

Gender, Love and Text in the Early Writings of Kanai Mieko

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The candidate confirms that the work submitted is her own and that appropriate credit has been given where reference has been made to the work of others.

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Abstract

This thesis examines and contextualises the early writings of Kanai Mieko, concentrating on the ways in which they instigate challenges to conventional inscriptions of gender, love, and text through a deployment of avant-garde narrative techniques. The first chapter argues that Kanai's early writings interrogate and problematise conventional inscriptions of identity and gender: her short stories 'Rabbits' and 'Rotting Meat' borrow the *form* of paradoxical concepts that arise out of various surrealist avant-garde theories (such as Okamoto's polaropositionalism and Sakaguchi's 'Discourse on Decadence') and can be read as a commentary upon the collective endeavours by contemporary feminists and women writers to create a written '*feminine*'. The second chapter further explores the subversive potential of Kanai's writings. It argues that Kanai's debut novella, *Love Life*, addresses the crisis of representation of the late 1960s by constructing two constellatory matrices of literary meaning: *Ai-body-presence* and *F-narrative-absence*. The first of these matrices, *Ai-body-presence*, is discernible in the inscription of the protagonist Ai's physical origin as *object* and can be read as a specific critique and enactment of how the crisis of representation affected the female body. The second, *F-narrative-absence*, is present in Ai's attempts to inscribe her absent husband F, enabling her to pursue an understanding of what it means to love. The final chapter examines another matrix of literary meaning in Kanai's writings in which text is described as if it is a body possessed of a consciousness, which Kanai herself refers to in her essay, 'Text/Reality/The Body', as the 'corporeal text'. It contends that the 'corporeal text' acts as a challenge to conventional understandings of both the relationship between body and consciousness, and between the reader and a given text. In so doing, it pursues a deliberate textual strategy to transform the reader into an active creator of meaning.

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Notes

Translations of Japanese-language sources are my own unless otherwise indicated. Japanese titles are followed by English translations in brackets and the English translation is used thereafter in the main body of the thesis, while the original Japanese titles are used in the footnotes. In English titles the first letter of every major word is capitalised and in Japanese titles only the first letter of the first word is capitalised. This thesis uses the MHRA system of referencing in which, in the footnotes, author names are cited with the given name followed by the family name; however, where there are Japanese authors of Japanese-language texts, author names are cited with the family name, followed by the given name.

Introduction

If I am ever going to prove that I am ‘the author’ to her, I suppose I will have to do so by writing an essay or a literary work. I came to know her – although in this case, I really don’t know whether the word ‘know’ is applicable – anyway, I began my strange relationship with her after writing my first story. Letters would arrive which opened with the line ‘I am the person who wrote the story published under your name.’ Letters with this opening mounted up; there were exactly the same number of them as stories I had written; and while I tried to ignore them, in truth, I was completely unable to do so. Whenever I continued to write, she would always be with me. Because there was no address or name on the letters, how was I supposed to be able to say anything back to the writer: ‘the real author’? The relationship between us was completely one directional. Of course, it is only from my point of view that it was ‘one directional’, she might not think so; but at any rate, I didn’t even know whether it was a *she* whose hand had written those letters.

Kanai Mieko, ‘Puratonteki ren’ai’ (‘Platonic Love’)

Kanai Mieko’s short fiction ‘Platonic Love’ contains a central enigma: who is the mysterious person who keeps writing letters to the story’s narrator – an ostensible version of Kanai herself – claiming to be ‘the real author’ of her writings? Any initial speculation that the self-styled ‘real author’ is, in fact, a demented reader (which, of course, would be the most straightforward interpretation, which is to say the most plausible interpretation, which is to say the most realist[ic] interpretation),¹ is problematised when the narrator eventually receives the manuscript of a short story from the ‘real author’, entitled ‘Platonic Love’; a manuscript which our protagonist has been planning to write. Any reader still determined to provide the most straightforward (most

¹ ‘Realistic’ refers to that textual quality of being representationally accurate (or ‘true to life’); ‘realist’ refers to *the mode of writing* that is responsible for such apparent representational accuracy.

plausible, most realist[ic]) reading of the story now has to account for ‘the real author’ differently: perhaps as a fictional construct of our (paranoid) narrator. But even this ‘straightforward’ account becomes difficult for the reader to unpack. If ‘the real author’ is created by the narrator of the story, it is because, as Amy Vladeck Heinrich has written, the narrator is racked with – and is enacting – the fear that ‘the producer is not one’s real self’.² In other words, in ‘Platonic Love’, the narrator, when signing her own name to her writings, is worried that any assumption (by, say, future readers) of an ontological association or link between text and text writer (or, in Heinrich’s terms the text ‘producer’) – the assumption, in other words, that the writing stands *metonymically* for the writer – would necessarily falsify the identity of the writer. The central enigma of the story, therefore, quickly becomes metonymic itself for the general enigma that is the relationship between author and text. For any author, to assign one’s name to a text might – by definition – lend a putative *authority* to that text; but to *assert* that authority is also to claim that the version of oneself that you are asking to be inferred from that text is somehow the correct one. But what assurance has one, in so doing, that one has *implied oneself accurately?*

To call these interpretive difficulties and complexities ‘straightforward,’ then, might seem wilfully, perversely oxymoronic. Nonetheless, they have the advantage for the reader of making the story safely ‘about’ something: ‘about’ authorial anxieties; ‘about’ the difficulties of being a writer; ‘about’ the stresses of the literary life etc. In other words, in spite of the story’s postmodern

² Amy Vladeck Heinrich, ‘Double Weave: The Fabric of Japanese Women’s Writing’, *World Literature Today*, 62 (1988), 408-14, p. 412.

convolutions, they can ultimately be accounted for within an interpretive framework that has as its basis a deeply conventional conception of both 'author' and 'reader'. No matter how dizzyingly complicated the story might be, if we can 'only' untangle it (and, when we deploy such a deeply conventional conception of the 'reader', and of that reader's relationship to the text, then we *can* 'only' untangle it), then we will be able to ascertain what Kanai *really* meant. And then our reward for such a successful disentanglement is a heightened sense of our own critical faculties.

However, let us pursue another reading of 'Platonic Love', a reading which might be rather more unsettling for the literary critic (and more unsettling still for the student contemplating the submission of a doctoral thesis on the early writings of Kanai Mieko): in this reading (there are, doubtless, many more) 'the real author' is the metaphorical personification of every instance whereby a literary critic describes the writer and/or their attributes (his/her talents, knowledge, aesthetic preferences, career, personal history, social context, hobbies, personal beliefs) as the true source of a given text. In such cases, the 'writer', or at least their *name* and the set of attributes which the critic attaches to that name (which may or may not be similar to the writer's own) is no more than a textual construct which we may refer to as 'the real author'. 'The real author' is thus a given writer's critics' attempts to account for and explain a text by using 'the writer' as a parameter of the text's meaning as if both text and writer are fixed, knowable, and definable entities.

Although such a textual construct may at first seem innocuous, in the same way that, in 'Platonic Love', the letters from the 'real author' seem 'ignorable' to the narrator, it actually commits two highly intrusive, if not

violent, literary acts. The first is, effectively, the theft of identity: by creating a textual construct which goes by the writer's name, the critic creates an imposter who challenges the writer's authorship of a given text, just as 'the real author' in 'Platonic Love' challenges the narrator's authorship. The second is the defacement of the text: by pronouncing that the text has a meaning which is linked to the writer of the text, the critic first imposes a limit upon it, and then reinscribes the text with his/her own interpretation, just as the writer in 'Platonic Love' is eventually presented with a manuscript that she didn't write. Of course, one might then, in turn, find problematic these two pejorative metaphors that I have just introduced – identity theft and defacement – as the former might be taken to imply that the only alternative to such deviant critical behaviour is for the critic to remain in a state of permanent obeisance, not only to the 'work' but also to the 'author' who 'created' it, while the latter might suggest that for the critic to presume only to tease out the author's 'true' meaning is actually to marginalise, through disavowing, the multitude of potential other meanings that a given text might generate. In other words, to conclude with our two criminalising metaphors, 'identity theft' is the consequence of a critical manoeuvre that is fundamentally disrespectful to the authority of the author; while 'defacement' is the consequence of a critical manoeuvre that is fundamentally disrespectful to the textuality of the text.

Returning to 'Platonic Love', we can see that it repeatedly interrogates the respective roles and functions of the categories 'author', 'reader' and 'text'; and, as such, it is representative of much of Kanai's literary output. As Sharalyn Orbaugh writes, Kanai is preoccupied in numerous writings with

the relationship between writer, reader, and text - or, rather, she is concerned with the impossibility of distinguishing these roles according to some unique function. The reader of a story 'writes' it as she reads; the writer of a story 'gets it' from somewhere impossible to identify and claim as her own (perhaps even from the letters of 'the real' author, the woman who continually claims to have originated the writer's stories in [...] 'Platonic Love'); and the story itself exists only in the *mise-en-abyme* sense of a production that is constantly reproduced, and differently, by each reader and has no existence outside that unceasing re-production.³

Orbaugh is undoubtedly correct in her assessment; and, as we shall see repeatedly in the course of this thesis, Kanai's writings, in their constant metafictional self-interrogation, bring to the fore questions of what it is to be a writer, what it is to be a reader and what it is to be a text. However, there is potentially consequent danger here, too, for anybody seeking to examine Kanai's writings; and that is the danger of consigning them to some critical cul-de-sac, wherein, once we have pointed out a given text's metatextuality, we can no longer say anything else, as there is literally nothing else to which it refers.

How, then, shall we discuss Kanai's writing? The answer is surely to locate some of the multiplicity of potential *contexts* for her writings; thence, having done so, and without privileging one such context over another, to try to examine what readings might be fruitfully generated therein. After all, a brief examination of Kanai's output quickly reveals just how multiple this multiplicity of potential contexts actually is. Not only does her output span nearly five decades, it also traverses a plethora of different literary genres of writing: literary and film criticism; social commentary; novels; short stories; poetry. The range of topics her writings encompass is also eclectic in the

³ Sharalyn Orbaugh, 'Arguing with the Real: Kanai Mieko', in *Ōe and Beyond*, ed. Stephen Snyder and Philip Gabriel (Hawai'i: University of Hawai'i Press, 1999) pp. 245-77, p. 249.

extreme: alongside serious intellectual discussions about gender and feminism, for instance, sit entire essay collections devoted to cats. Indeed, it is this very prolificness that makes it so difficult to account for Kanai's output in terms of its being a coherent, unified *body of work* which derives and achieves such cohesiveness and unity from its creative wellspring, 'the real author': Kanai Mieko.

The remarkable diversity of Kanai's output, the equally numerous artistic influences which it references, her output's familiarity with theoretical discourses across a spectrum of disciplines, and its perceived mastery of very different genres, are all features which have, from the very beginning of her career, been recognised and reviewed positively, and have, no doubt, contributed to Kanai's acceptance into the elite circle of the Japanese *literati*.⁴ However, her acceptance into the very institution which contrives to shape public opinion belies her career's radical and countercultural beginnings. At the time of her debut in 1967, she was the first woman writer of her generation of post-war baby-boomers to break onto the literary scene with a succession of radical and acclaimed *avant-garde* texts that challenged and irrevocably changed the Japanese literary tradition of which they have since become a part. The late 1960s through to mid-1970s was a time of social and political upheaval in Japan: the Japanese government's tacit support of the United States had increasingly polarised public sentiment; while left-wing protest groups had

⁴ See for instance Nakagami Kenji 'Kōshitsu no kagayaki o hanatsu kotoba' ['Language That Gives Off a Hard Radiance'] in *Kanai Mieko: Zentanpenshū* Vol. 1 (insert) (Tokyo: Nihon bungeisha, 1992); Suga Hidemi 'Kanai Mieko: Hito to Sakuhin' [Kanai Mieko: People and Art] in *Shōwa Bungaku Zenshū 31* (Tokyo: Shōgakukan, 1988) pp. 961-64; and Orbaugh's, 'Arguing with the Real: Kanai Mieko' (in which she mentions Nakagami's review).

become more and more radicalised and extreme in response. The avant-garde scene, in which Kanai was immersed, offered a means of critiquing both ends of this political spectrum. Kanai's writings of this time employ surrealist techniques and theories to subvert the conceptions of 'truth' and 'reality' underpinning modern Japanese cultural identities. In particular, as they recognise identity as a construct of language, or rather as a narrative which covers over the fragmented and changeable essence of being, they lay a challenge not only to the literary *status quo*, but also to feminist discourse and women's writing by critiquing 'woman's construction of woman' through writing. It is this early persistent critique of the 'written feminine', this thesis argues, that distinguishes Kanai's early writings from those of her contemporaries (such as Takahashi Takako, Tsushima Yūko and Kurahashi Yumiko) who were also engaged in subverting gender binaries.

As five decades of prolific and disparate writings by Kanai cannot be adequately summarised, defined or otherwise constrained by any grand interpretive narrative, it is necessary to acknowledge, at the outset, that this thesis in no way strives for any illusory 'completeness'; in its discussion of Kanai, it offers itself neither as a *synthesising* account of Kanai's output, nor as a *synoptic* one. Rather, it has a self-imposed limitation: it focuses on a comparatively small number of Kanai's early writings; it then chooses to situate this select number of essays and literary texts within multiple contemporary contexts (literary, social, theoretical, political, scientific, cultural) all of which overlap and none of which can be claimed as definitive.

If we thus choose to locate Kanai's writings within a plurality of contemporary contexts, it is partly because those contemporary contexts

identified themselves in terms of such plurality. Indeed, the 1960s and 1970s saw the emergence, across a broad spectrum of scientific, philosophical and critical discourses, of fundamental challenges to their respective epistemological certainties: a resurgence of critical interest in the Theory of Relativity after the discovery of exotic astronomical phenomena such as quasars (1963), the 3-Kelvin microwave background radiation (1965), and the first black hole (1971), for instance, paralleled the emergence of key poststructuralist texts such as Jacques Derrida's 'Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences' (1966), Roland Barthes' 'The Death of the Author' (1967), and Luce Irigaray's *Speculum of the Other Woman* (1974).⁵ If the nascent theories from these very different disciplines had something in common, it lay in their identification and foregrounding of plurality and instability, their decisive exploration into the as-yet-unknown and the infinite, and their concomitant problematisation of any absolute knowable source or origin. For instance, the identification of 3-Kelvin microwave background radiation as the thermal and audial remnant of the Big Bang and thus as a present-time echo of the origin of the universe which continues ever to morph and reverberate can be seen to destabilise the very notion of 'origin' itself. So, too, the discovery of quasars (extremely distant active galactic nuclei first identified by their infrared radiation) led to their being posited as evidence for the hypothesis that the universe is continually expanding. Similarly, the

⁵ These dates refer to the original French sources. Their translations into English which this thesis has consulted are: Jacques Derrida, 'Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences', in *Writing and Difference* (London: Routledge, 1978) pp. 278-93; Roland Barthes, 'The Death of the Author', in *Image, Music, Text* (London: Fontana, 1977); Luce Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman*. trans. Gillian Gill (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1985).

recognition of black holes in the astronomical landscape led to a range of theories about what happens, as density of matter and the curvature of space-time becomes infinite, to the meaning – and the stability of meaning – of the previously-‘known’ truths and concepts about the universe.⁶ Meanwhile, Derrida described an irreconcilable polarisation in the discourse of the human sciences. On the one hand, there existed studies which sought a singular ‘truth’ or ‘origin’. On the other hand, there were those which, in a ‘Nietzschean *affirmation*’, delighted in the infinite ‘play’ of symbols that elude such ‘origin’ and therefore required the repeated and ‘active interpretation’ of the reader.⁷ Similarly, Barthes put forward that rather than the Author’s constituting the limit of the text, the text far exceeds the control of the Author, constituting, as it does, a ‘multiplicity’ of other texts and cultures and entering into its own dialogue with texts around it through parody and contestation, so that its meaning, or ‘unity’ rests with an anonymous and unknowable readership; and Irigaray argued that all gender and sexuality had hitherto been linguistically constructed around a uniform ‘masculine’ desire, and that there needed to be an exploration and writing of the ‘*feminine*’, of a completely ‘alterior’ way of conceiving, defining and desiring which yet asserted itself to ‘presence’, and was not merely contrived to be the ‘absence’ of the masculine.⁸

⁶ For a description of these exotic astronomical phenomena see: Heilbron, J. L., *The Oxford Companion to the History of Modern Science* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

⁷ Derrida, 'Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences' pp. 292-293.

⁸ Barthes, 'The Death of the Author', pp.142-148; Irigaray outlines how psychological (Freudian) models of gender and sexuality have contrived woman through an assumed symmetry to man in her first doctoral thesis and puts the case forward for developing a notion of ‘alterity’ through gender in subsequent works which explore the divine, the

These scientific and theoretical pluralities extend also to the immediate sociocultural context of post-war Japan: specifically, the Japanese avant garde movement and its positive harnessing of the politico-cultural potential offered by new theories on the semiotic production of identities which recognised that conventional *oppositional* protest politics not only fed into the agenda of state authority, but also stifled, rendered stagnant and obscured statements of, and debates about, an ever-proliferating cultural plurality.⁹ The avant garde movement channelled young political energy into subversive art forms and maintained a profound scepticism of those grand narratives that maintained essentialist and universalising binary conceptions of, say, authority/individual, artist/audience and man/woman. Such binaries, the avant garde perceived, lie at the heart, not only of the values of the mainstream who were increasingly accepting of Liberal Democratic Party promises of higher standards of living in substitution for a varied democratic voice, but also of the values of the many protest groups who sought liberation and equality from the post-occupation authorities.¹⁰ It therefore set out to deconstruct the oppositionalism of such political categories; and, through parody and a postmodernist ‘play’, to critique

cosmic, space and time, the elements and Greek Mythology. For the former see Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman*, pp. 11-33; and for a discussion of the latter see: Luce Irigaray, *This Sex Which Is Not One* trans. Catherine Porter and Carolyn Burke (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1985); and Luce Irigaray, *An Ethics of Sexual Difference* trans. Carolyn Burke and Gillian Gill (London: Continuum, 2004).

⁹ All of the following texts describe and discuss the importance of non-oppositional methods of protest among avant-garde artists and contemporary protest groups. Steven Ridgely, *Japanese Counterculture: The Antiestablishment Art of Terayama Shūji* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010); William Marotti, 'Japan 1968: The Performance of Violence and the Theater of Protest', *American Historical Review*, 114 (2009), 97-135; Setsu Shigematsu, *Scream from the Shadows: The Women's Liberation Movement in Japan* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012).

¹⁰ John Dower, 'Peace and Democracy in Two Systems: External Policy and Internal Conflict', in *Postwar Japan as History*, ed. Andrew Gordon (California: University of California Press, 1993).

both ends of the spectrum, while working to complicate the debate on subjectivity, to reclaim the right for freedom of expression and extend the boundaries of identity formation.

Such specific cultural contexts include (to name but a few): the slogans that characterised contemporary Japanese feminism, the head-to-head discussion on women's writing between Tsushima Yūko and Takahashi Takako; Okamoto Tarō's theory of polaropositionalism, Sakaguchi Ango's 'Discourse of Decadence' and the avant garde's deployment of the atomic bomb as an aesthetic trope; the deliberations of the 1967 Dazai Osamu Prize Committee; the respective theories of Julia Kristeva and Luce Irigaray; Hijikata Tatsumi's rigorously experimental dance form, *butō*; the New Age science of Fritjof Capra and David Bohm; the writings of Mishima Yukio, Franz Kafka, Hans Christian Andersen and Lewis Carroll; Disney's *Pinocchio*; and the engravings of Gustave Doré. It is within these various contexts, then, that our discussion(s) situate Kanai's writing, in order to examine such readings and meanings that may thereby be generated (by us) from each text under discussion.

Specifically, Chapter One proposes that the writings of Kanai Mieko can be read as constituting a response to the dilemma that creating a written *feminine* (by for instance deciding to speak and write collectively, in a representationalist idiom) reifies the category of 'woman' and defines her in opposition to 'man', thus reproducing the premises upon which a hegemonic patriarchal order organises itself. It starts by considering Kanai's 1972 essay 'What is "a Woman" to a Woman?' which sets out how, in separate ways, both feminists and women writers were perpetuating gender division through their discursive constructions of woman. Turning to Kanai's early short fiction works

'Rotting Meat' and 'Rabbits', Chapter One next contends that these stories, by forming themselves around avant-garde tropes such as Okamoto's polaropositionalism and the concept of decay in Sakaguchi's 'Discourse on Decadence', dismantle established categories of gender and sexuality by overturning the framework through which such categories are irrevocably shaped.

Chapter Two argues how, in Kanai's novella *Love Life*, the representation of its protagonist, Ai, can be situated within the context of the cultural output of 1960s Japanese avant-gardism, and seen as an exemplar of the various crises of representation that such avant-gardism critiqued or enacted. Specifically, *Love Life* critiques (and enacts) how that crisis of representation affected the female body; and the prism through which such critique is refracted is an interrogation of what it means to love and to be in love. To this end the chapter posits how Kanai deploys the textual strategy of using a constellatory fictive technique that constructs twin matrices of literary meaning. The first, *Ai-body-presence*, derives from the narrative inscription of Ai's abjected physiological origin, which assails her when she attempts to eat, recalling images of parasites, corpses and the dismembered maternal body. The second, *F-narrative-absence*, is discernible in Ai's attempts to describe (or, rather, *inscribe*) her husband, F, and her relationship with him, attempts which seek to render his physical *absence* from her narrative account as a textual *presence*.

Chapter Three considers how Kanai's subsequent writings further explore the relationship between these various phenomena, specifically by examining how Kanai repeatedly sets in play a different constellatory matrix of meaning: *text-body-mind*. Again and again, Kanai elides the three through her

repeated descriptions of *text* as though it is a physical *body* possessed of a *consciousness*. This new matrix features significantly as a trope in Kanai's writings, a trope which Kanai refers to as 'the corporeal text'. Focusing on two of Kanai's essays, 'Nikutairon e josetsu dai'ippo' ('Towards a Theory of Corporeality', 1969), 'Kotoba/genjitsu/nikutai' ('Text/Reality/The Body', 1984), and a piece of short fiction, 'Kūki otoko no hanashi' ('The Story of the Inflated Man', 1974); Chapter Three aims to show how the dissolution of the conceptual discreteness of each constituent member of our new matrix operates in these writings as a fundamental challenge both to conventional notions of the acts of reading and writing and, specifically, to the conventional situation of the reader in relation to a given text.

In her afterword (*atogaki*) to *Platonic Love* (the collection takes its name from the story), Kanai writes:

Considering the fact that a person reading a text will shave away some parts by skipping over them, and will write in new things by reading words that aren't there, it is not merely the person called the writer who writes a text, the reader also 'produces' a text. The writer of the resulting story is certainly not 'I'.¹¹

This insight, then, this framing of the text as being ultimately and inevitably forever in an attitude of interpretive *oblation* towards the reader, offering itself up as an entrance into a network of potential textual and intertextual meanings; this is the outcome to which the trajectory of the thesis brings us. In other words, the thesis concludes that Kanai's conception of the

¹¹ Kanai Mieko, *Kanai Mieko: Zentanpenshū* [*Kanai Mieko: A Complete Short Story Collection*] Vol. 3 (Tokyo: Nihonbungeisha, 1992) pp. 602-603, trans. Sharalyn Orbaugh, 'Arguing with the Real: Kanai Mieko', in *Ōe and Beyond*, ed. Stephen Snyder and Philip Gabriel (Hawai'i: University of Hawai'i Press, 1999) pp. 245-77, p. 249.

corporeal text is not merely a bespoke theory concocted simply to account for 'The Story of the Inflated Man'; rather, it is a theoretical prism through which we can read not only the other Kanai texts discussed in this thesis, and not only Kanai's other literary writings, but arguably, *Writing* itself. Kanai's deployment of the corporeal text is a deliberate act that is designed to transform the reader's experiential relationship with the text from being that of a passive recipient to one of an active, engaged creator of meaning.

Chapter One

Reading 'Rotting Meat' and 'Rabbits' through the Paradoxes of Surrealism

Foucault points out that juridical systems of power *produce* the subjects they subsequently come to represent. [...] If this analysis is right, the juridical formation of language and politics that represents women as 'the subject' of feminism is itself a discursive formation and effect of a given version of representational politics. And the feminist subject turns out to be discursively constituted by the very political system that is supposed to facilitate its emancipation.

Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*

What remains to be done, then, is to work at 'destroying' the discursive mechanism. Which is not a simple undertaking.... For how can we introduce ourselves into such a tightly-woven systematicity?

Luce Irigaray, *This Sex Which Is Not One*

Introduction

The fundamental premise of all feminisms is that there is a division between the genders, and that women are subordinated and oppressed within a system of male dominance. However, as Judith Butler points out in the epigraph above, if we are to assume, after Foucault, that this system establishes its power through channels which include the discursive construction of our own identities, then these feminisms' acknowledgement of the fundamental premise upon which they are constructed serves only to affirm and reify that system's reality.¹ Feminist critics and women writers who accept Butler's

¹ Butler is here referring to: Michel Foucault, 'Right of Death and Power over Life', in *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1, An Introduction* (New York: Vintage, 1980).

understanding of the manner in which identity is forged are thus faced with an enormous challenge in attempting to write against it; for, as the epigraph by Luce Irigaray asks, how is it possible to destroy a system of language within which the subject is always already constituted without reiterating, and thereby reaffirming, its terms?

This chapter proposes that the writings of Kanai Mieko not only display an *awareness* of this specific dilemma, but also can be read as constituting a *response* to it. This is evident in the way in which Kanai, in marked contrast to other woman writers and feminist intellectuals in Japan at the time, was extremely careful in her early non-fiction not to formulate a definition of ‘woman’, but rather to question those who did. For example, her 1972 essay ‘Onna ni totte onna to wa nani ka?’ (‘What is “a Woman” to a Woman?’) sets out how, in separate ways, both feminists and women writers were perpetuating, rather than interrogating, discrimination and gender division through their discursive constructions of woman.² In the essay, Kanai criticises a broad range of targets: the Japanese *ribu* (women’s lib movement); the efforts of those of her female contemporaries in Japan who were attempting to distance themselves from the category of ‘woman’ in order to gain an intellectual status; and (what she perceives as) the essentialism of Simone de Beauvoir’s apparent insistence that only women can write authentically about being a woman. Contrasting this and Kanai’s other early essays with those of her female contemporaries, this chapter argues that, taken together, they constitute a critique of *joseiron* (the collective endeavour to define womanhood, and hence

² Kanai Mieko, ‘Onna ni totte onna to wa nani ka’ [‘What is “a Woman” to a Woman’] in *Kōza onna 1: Naze onna ka?* (Tokyo: Chikuma shobō, 1972) pp. 68-83.

to produce a written feminine) while illustrating her distance from, rather than her alignment with, their discourse. This is not to assert that her early non-fiction writings are ‘anti-feminist’, but rather to claim that they are attempts to advance the debate on gender and sexuality beyond the boundaries of what was commonly and contemporaneously understood to be ‘feminism’.

Turning to Kanai’s early short fiction works ‘Funiku’ (‘Rotting Meat’, 1972) and ‘Usagi’ (‘Rabbits’, 1972), this chapter next outlines how these stories simultaneously dismantle established categories of gender and sexuality by overturning the dichotomising and hierarchical framework through which such categories are irrevocably shaped, while forming themselves around avant-garde tropes which offer alternative value systems.³ Both stories depict female characters whose twin modes of living and being are informed by patterns and cycles of death and socially-transgressive sexual desire; each story culminates in the female characters’ killing of their sexual partners, while the self-exclusion from society and its norms that is the lot of the nameless, murderous prostitute in ‘Rotting Meat’ is echoed, more extremely, in the self-mutilation and death of the rabbit-girl in ‘Rabbits’. And yet, both stories also locate these female narratives within the narrative of an anonymous, framing primary narrator, which has the effect of reinforcing the textual materiality of each narrative.

³ ‘Funiku’ (‘Rotting Meat’) was first published in 1972 in the May edition of the literary magazine, *Nami*; ‘Usagi’ (‘Rabbits’) was first published the following month, in the June edition of the literary magazine *Subaru*. Both stories were reprinted in Kanai’s first short-story collection, Kanai Mieko, *Usagi [Rabbits]* (Tokyo: Chikuma shobō, 1973). These, and other works in this collection, notably ‘Ai aru kagiri’ (‘As Long as There is Love’), ‘Kikan’ (‘The Return’), ‘Boshizō’ (‘A Figure of Mother and Child’), ‘Chimamire Mari’ (‘Bloody Marie’), ‘Mimi’ (‘The Ear’), ‘Yamamba’ (‘The Mountain Witch’) and ‘Kōtansai no yoru’ (‘Christmas Night’), present the reader with disturbing narratives of bloody violence, incestuous or (what Kristeva might have termed) *jouissant* acts of sex (in that they invoke death), or describe isolated individuals in relationships with eternally absent lovers.

Because of these stories' unnerving juxtaposition of death, slaughter, mutilation, and sexual activity (as well as their constant problematisation of conventional male-ness and female-ness), and also because they reveal the processes of gender and identity construction to be akin to the process of writing fiction, it is perhaps not surprising that, out of the four different critics who have written most extensively about these stories, three of them have situated the stories within a feminist framework.⁴ (The fourth, Takeuchi Kayō, even while challenging the relevance of feminist criticism to 'Rabbits', nonetheless still situates the story within debates surrounding sexuality and identity through the application of queer theory.)⁵ However, this chapter (even as it addresses these various critical interpretations) argues that, although 'Rotting Meat' and 'Rabbits' are undeniably relevant to feminist and gender theories, the critical application of such theories and theoretical frameworks to both stories – in an effort to interpret them – effectively (if implicitly) undermines their deconstruction and rewriting of categories of

⁴ These three critics and their respective essays are: Mary Knighton, 'Writing the Body as Meat: Kanai Mieko's "Rotting Meat" as Surreal Fable', in *Japanese Studies around the World 2004. Observing Japan from Within: Perspectives of Foreign Scholars Resident in Japan*, ed. James Baxter (International Research Centre for Japanese Studies, 2004) pp. 161-88; Mary Knighton, 'Down the Rabbit Hole: In Pursuit of Shojo Alices', from Lewis Carroll to Kanai Mieko', *U.S.-Japan Women's Journal* 40 (2011) 49-89; Kitada Sachie, 'Usagi: Hito to bungaku' ['Rabbits: People and Literature'] in *Tanpen Josei Bungaku: Gendai*, ed. Yabu Teiko, Watanabe Sumiko and Imai Yasuko (Tokyo: Ōfū, 1993) pp. 153-60; Kitada Sachie, 'Kanai Mieko ni okeru "shōjo" to "boken"' ['The "Young Woman" and "Maternal Rights" in Kanai Mieko's Works'] in *Haha to musume no feminizumu: Gendai kazoku o koete*, ed. Kitada Sachie, Mizuta Noriko and Hasegawa Hiroshi (Tokyo: Tahata shōten, 1996) pp. 140-56; Sharalyn Orbaugh, 'The Body in Contemporary Women's Fiction', in *The Woman's Hand: Gender and Theory in Japanese Women's Writing*, ed. Paul and Walker Schalow, Janet (Stanford, California.: Stanford University Press, 1996) pp. 119-64.

⁵ Takeuchi Kayō, 'Kanai Mieko "Usagi" o meguru kuia – "shōjo" no monogatori kara "watashi" no monogatari e' ['The Queer in Kanai Mieko's "Rabbits": From the Story of the "Shōjo" to the Story of "Watashi"'] *Shōwa bungaku kenkyū* 2008, pp. 163-84.

gender and sexuality by reapplying, rather than destroying, the discursive formations through which the subject of feminism is constituted.

In order to better illustrate Kanai's early attempts to deconstruct categories of gender and sexuality and find alternative models through which to express identity, this chapter seeks to foreground the destabilising of such categories, and, rather than reclaiming these texts as 'feminist texts', instead turns to the theories and writings of Kanai's avant-garde peers. In re-analysing these stories within such multiple contexts, the chapter posits that Kanai's awareness and use of postmodern, surrealist techniques and literary forms facilitates and frames her critique – through the medium of fiction – of *Joseiron*. Again, although it is the chapter's hypothesis that Kanai's writings constitute a critique of women's discourses, this in no way suggests that they are somehow non-, or a-political, or even that they are 'unconnected' to feminism (as some critics have stated), but rather that they can be read as an attempt to use the techniques, paradoxes and narrative strategies of avant-garde surrealism to continue and advance debates on gender and sexuality.⁶

Kanai's Early Critique of *Joseiron*

Kanai's scepticism towards the second-wave feminist movement can be fruitfully situated alongside the avant-garde's dislike of oppositional and

⁶ It was originally Suga Hidemi who commented that Kanai was 'unconnected to the school of feminism in every possible way' in Suga Hidemi, 'Kanai Mieko, Hito to sakuhin', in *Shōwa Bungaku Zenshū* Vol. 31 (Tokyo: Shōgakukan, 1988) pp. 961-64, p. 961. However Takeuchi cites Suga in disputing claims that 'Rabbits' is a feminist text in Takeuchi, 'Kanai Mieko "Usagi" o meguru kuia – "shōjo" no monogatari kara "watashi" no monogatari e', p. 163.

antagonistic discourse such as that which typified the speeches and writings of the protest movements of the time. Her 1970 essay 'Shinribunseki o kirau' ('A Hatred of Psychoanalysis') professes a disdain for 'texts that commodify women' (*onna o urimono ni suru bunshō*), whether 'women's lib texts' (*ūman ribu no bunshō*), or texts that effectively construe the writer to be a 'psychoanalysed' or 'confessional' subject (*shinribunsekiteki, kokuhakuteki bunshō*), irrespective of whether they aim at 'revolution', or not (*kakumei, hankakumei o towazu*).⁷ The essay's critique of women's writing implies that Kanai holds subjectivity to be a construct of language; and that women, by writing texts that typically attempt to define the self (such as psychoanalytical and confessional texts) create an image of 'woman' which affirms (even if unwittingly) the notion that the female identity is fixed and subordinated within an established set of hierarchical binary oppositions (such as men/women, author/reader). Kanai's 1972 essay entitled 'What is "a Woman" to a Woman?', reiterates this critique of the women's lib movement in Japan and of other female writers. With regard to the former, Kanai asserts:

The biggest mistake brought forth by the concept of so-called 'equality of men and women' is that women have tended to think in terms which makes being the same as men, or rather being 'equal' to men, the highest objective. There is no mistaking that such a way of conceiving, giving unlimited reverence to and placing unconditional value on being the same as men [...] produces (lit. *is: sono mama*) an underlying complex towards men.⁸

The 'underlying complex' to which Kanai refers here is women's own prejudices against themselves, or against other women, which are then re-

⁷ Kitada Sachie (1996) p. 140. Kitada here cites from Kanai's essay, which she references as: 'Shinribunseki o kirau' ['A Hatred of Psychoanalysis'] 1970.

⁸ Kanai, 'Onna ni totte onna to wa nani ka', p. 82.

presented as 'striving for equality with men'. In other words, the second-wave feminist movement was, in Kanai's view, setting itself up as a category that defined itself through competition with, and in adversity to, an 'other', and it thereby (re)produced a discourse that ultimately could only serve to maintain the very differences and inequalities that they wished to dismantle. Kanai's attitude towards the women's lib movement in Japan seems to echo the (contemporaneous) avant-garde movement's insight that the adoption of a political position which assumes the government's violent repression leads inexorably to violent repression, just as, to use an instance from the times, students carrying staves during the Anpo protests served to justify authority's use of force to implement law and order to end the university sit-ins.⁹

However, Kanai's rejection of *joseiron* did not mean that she sought to deny her identity as a woman. As she further notes, with regard to intellectuals and women writers of her time,

⁹ William Marotti, 'Japan 1968: The Performance of Violence and the Theater of Protest', *American Historical Review*, 114 (2009), pp. 97-135. Marotti argues that by carrying staves on campus, students played into the hands of the police who had wanted the students to be perceived as the instigators of violence and that further police tactics were to practice restraint in protests from October 1968 and that this again was broadcast through the media and helped to secure public support for the eventual suppression of the student protest movement. (See pp. 128-135). As Ridgely also notes on 1960s avant-garde 'countercultural' resistance: 'The term "counterculture" itself may be misleading [...] since the manoeuvres it makes are] better visualised as a 90-degree turn away from the square establishment than as a 180-degree reversal, which comes off as a reactionary inversion and is easily dismissed as a childlike rejection of adult society. [...] It is, in fact, recognition of power's need for opposition to justify its reign that may have led to counterculture's refusal to become that sort of predictable, and welcomed, frontal attack. The 90-degree turn literally turns the tables, and the power center suddenly has to give chase, but by the time they find these pockets of counterculture (now scattered in every direction), it is counterculture that is in the position of defending its own territory against invasion, a useful boost for morale'. See Steven Ridgely, *Japanese Counterculture: The Antiestablishment Art of Terayama Shūji* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010) pp. XIV-XV.

[i]t is said that from a man's perspective the most vile shade of verbal abuse in which women partake is when women are spoken ill of, and the intelligent woman is delighted, and the more he criticises women, the more she agrees (while making a face that shows she has escaped all of women's defects, and writing herself as the very model of an intelligent woman) – that it is true – women are hateful, which in turn allows him to succeed in impressing even more strongly how women are shallow, fickle, and selfish, lack self-awareness [...] and hold a despicable hatred of their own sex. The denial of what is said to constitute 'woman' (or the various characteristics that it is said that men who are infatuated with women attribute to them) is the most indispensable passport that the intelligent woman possesses for the sake of being intelligent [...].¹⁰

Although Kanai's comments here critique both men and women's discourse around what it means to be a woman, they seem to be specifically addressing a trend in women's writing in which women writers seek to distance themselves from the category of 'woman'. The intelligent woman's construction of her identity (by disavowing what is said to constitute 'woman') is shown to be as counter-effective as the women's lib movement's desire to be equal to, or the same as, men. In both instances, women are here subscribing to the same binary and hierarchical system of language, in which women are irrevocably defined in antithesis, and as subordinate, to men. In holding an awareness of language as a binary and hierarchical system of categorisation, Kanai seeks through her essays and her early short stories, to expose its inherent contradictions, to call the entire system into question, and to demonstrate that identity is a fiction forever susceptible to being constructed on an antithetical model.

¹⁰ Kanai, 'Onna ni totte onna to wa nani ka', p. 81 .

Many of Kanai's contemporaries by contrast, even those renowned for subverting gender norms in their fictional writings, such as Takahashi Takako, Tsushima Yūko, and Kurahashi Yumiko, were not as consistent or as thorough as Kanai in questioning the role of language in forming gendered identities. This is notable in their non-fiction essays and round-table discussions throughout the 1960s and 1970s. Second-wave feminism had deployed a rhetoric which, despite depending on the very value-systems that it ultimately wished to dismantle, nonetheless professed solidarity with other women through its cause. Women writers contemporaneous with Kanai's literary debut, on the other hand, openly expounded their belief that females, because of the language that they used and the social function (rearing children) that they fulfilled, were not 'intellectual'. Some women writers differentiated themselves from their own gender by stating that they were prone to using more 'masculine' language, and claiming that they themselves were more intellectual than physical. Eventually, some took to aggrandising the 'corporeality' of women, and by extension of women's writing, in order to claim greater 'authenticity' than male writers were capable of, in the inscription of the body, and thereby in their contributions to *nikutaibungaku* (carnal literature).¹¹

¹¹ During the occupation of Japan, censorship over depictions of the sexual body was lifted, and owing to this, many stories appeared, both populist and intellectual, which gave graphic depictions of the body. As we shall later discuss in further detail, writers such as Sakaguchi Ango (and others such as Noma Hiroshi and Tamura Tajirō), inscribed the body as an origin of the self as a means of critiquing the Japanese state. Douglas N. Slaymaker, *The Body in Postwar Japanese Fiction* (London: Routledge Curzon, 2004) offers a detailed account of postwar *nikutaibungaku* ('carnal literature' or 'literature of the flesh').

Many texts that discuss the differences between male and female writers were produced from the late 1960s. Of these, this chapter examines two essays: Kurahashi

Setting Kanai's writings aside for the moment, we should look in greater detail into how other women writers were representing themselves and 'woman' generally. Takahashi's contributions to the debate, for example, are a prime illustration of how women writers trod a precarious path, attempting to infiltrate the 'intellectual' arena which had previously been reserved for men on the one hand, while asserting women's (and their own) marginalisation as 'carnal beings' on the other, thus ring-fencing and elevating their own literature. In an essay entitled 'Onnagirai' ('Woman-hating', 1975) she starts out by explaining how the Japanese word '*onnakodomo*' (the women and children) had always struck her as a curious one: 'why', she wonders, 'should women and children be stuck together as one?' (*naze, onna to kodomo ga kuttsuketearu no darō*).¹² Growing up with a particular curiosity towards words, she had imagined that this term held some special meaning; for example, an implication that all children were in some way feminine, or that it was a reference to 'effeminate' (*memeshī*) children only.¹³ However, her essay goes on to say that while she subsequently came to understand that such a category was created and spoken or written of by 'men', she nevertheless was able to comprehend this category as a coherent one, even though it was a

Yumiko, 'Dokuyaku toshite no bungaku' ['Poisonous Literature'] in *Dokuyaku toshite no bungaku* (Tokyo: Kōdansha bungei bunko, 1999) pp. 68-77 (originally published in *Warera no bungaku* [*Our Literature*] 21 (1966)); and Takahashi Takako, 'Onnagirai' ['Woman Hating'] in *Tamashi no inu* (Tokyo: Kōdansha, 1975) pp. 229-32; and a head-to-head discussion: Takahashi Takako and Tsushima Yūko 'Onna no sei to otoko no me', *Waseda bungaku*, 30 (1978) 4-14; translated as 'Female Sexuality and the Male Gaze: A Dialogue between Takahashi Takako and Tsushima Yūko', trans. Maryellen Tomon Mori in *Woman Critiqued*, ed. Rebecca Copeland (Hawai'i: University of Hawai'i Press, 2006) pp. 119-34.

¹² Takahashi, 'Onnagirai', p. 229.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 229.

category she felt to be outside of herself and from which she felt a huge disassociation, a disassociation rooted in fear.¹⁴ Takahashi attributes her alienation to this category to the 'physiological [...] corporeal language' of women which she purports to have discovered when writing a particular novel.¹⁵ She argues that it is in this way that women's language is approximate to the language of children, and that it is precisely this which renders it impossible for men to feel comfortable in all-female environments, such as the hairdressers, or public baths, where intimate physical details are discussed as matter-of-fact.¹⁶ Talking about the intent behind her novel that led her to the discovery, she asserts:

I wanted to go as far as to say that it is the carnal language of women which makes it impossible for men to be with women. I wanted to go as far as to say I could only think that men and women were like different races in their possession of different languages.¹⁷

Takahashi's self-professed project in writing in this essay thus appears to be to expose women's linguistic configuration as a physiological, carnal, marginalised under-class, and by extension, as intimately linked to their sociological function of producing and rearing the young. Takahashi's writings' challenge to the validity of such categories in this instance is thus solely through her own

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 229-32.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 231.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 230.

¹⁷ Ibid., pp. 230-231 .

experience of dislocation, as an exception to those ‘women and children’.¹⁸ Nonetheless, her essay describes her external position as ‘male’ and therefore (unlike Kanai’s early essays that we have discussed above), does not seek, or is unable, to reframe her own subjectivity in a non-binary dynamic, or even (unlike the second-wave movement) to challenge the pejorative connotations of the carnality of women and children. Indeed, her essay concludes by declaring that her respect and longing for the ‘mental superiority’ (*seishinteki yūi*) and ‘independence’ (*dokujisei*) of ‘men’ will be with her for life.¹⁹

Conversely however, three years later, Takahashi would be aided by Tsushima in a head-to-head discussion ‘Onna no sei to otoko no me’ (‘Female Sexuality and the Male Gaze’, 1978) in inverting the hierarchy that she had formerly established in her essay.²⁰ In this discussion, while women are consistently aligned with the physiological, and men are consistently aligned with the intellectual, women’s superiority over men is installed by attributing positive value to women’s putative ‘passive’ and ‘physiological’ nature, while men’s ‘ideological’ stance is presented as somehow lacking, as the following excerpt illustrates:

Tsushima: [w]hen it comes to the mundane aspects of caring for a dying person, the people who nurse the sick in hospitals are women, and those who make funeral arrangements are women.

¹⁸ Without seeking a psychobiographical explanation, we might also note that her writings display, at the very least, a distaste for motherhood; and infanticide, both fantasised and enacted, is the theme of Takahashi’s works throughout the 1970s. See, for instance: ‘Byōbō’ [‘Endless Expanse’] in *Kanata no mizuoto* (Tokyo: Kōdansha, 1971) pp. 113-64; *Sora no hate made* [To the End of the Sky] (Tokyo: Shinchōsha, 1973); and ‘Ningyō ai’ [‘Doll Love’] in *Ningyō ai* (Tokyo: Kōdansha, 1978).

¹⁹ Takahashi, ‘Onnagirai’, p. 231-32.

²⁰ Takahashi Takako and Tsushima Yūko ‘Onna no sei to otoko no me’, *Waseda bungaku*, 30 (1978), 4-14.

It's usually women who handle the physical tasks related to those occasions. Because of that, women don't think about either life or death separately, in a linear fashion. We think of them as a circuitous, amorphous whole. A woman seems to view the world as a system that she's powerless to influence, and she instinctively adapts herself to that.

Takahashi: That's right. Female physiology is embedded in that universal physiology that encompasses life and death. So in a sense, women don't think of life and death as separate from each other. Men tend to think of life and death in a conceptual way. They consider them in the context of an ideological system. But women's physiology is deeply enmeshed in those. That's a difference. Tsushima-san, you're regarded as an intellectual writer and so am I. Even so, when I think and when I write, my whole body is involved in those processes. I think this is fundamentally different from a male writer's approach.²¹

Their mode of discussion in this debate was to mark something of a precedent for women writers and intellectuals in critiquing and analysing the literary tastes and standards of esteemed male writers, including those writers' depiction of women in literature. Just over a decade later, in 1989, a number of such discussions between Ōgura Chikako, Ueno Chizuko and Tomioka Taeko began, eventually culminating in a larger publication entitled *Danryū bungakuron* (*On Men's Literature*, 1992) which mocked established male writers such as Mishima Yukio, Tanizaki Jun'ichiro and Murakami Haruki for their depiction of sex, sexuality and gender.²² Kanai, as we have already noted, in turn counter-critiqued such work in various early-career essays, and later became infamous for distancing herself from 'feminist' readings of literature

²¹ 'Female Sexuality and the Male Gaze: A Dialogue between Takahashi Takako and Tsushima Yūko' (trans. Maryellen Tomon Mori) p. 125.

²² Ogura Chikako, Tomioka Taeko, and Ueno Chizuko, *Danryū bungakuron* [*Male-stream Literature*] (Tokyo: Chikuma shobō, 1992), selections from chapter 3 also translated as 'On Men's Literature: Ueno Chizuko, Ogura Chikako and Tomioka Taeko' trans. Maryellen Tomon Mori in *Woman Critiqued*, ed. Rebecca Copeland (Hawai'i: University of Hawai'i Press, 2006) pp. 210-234.

and for producing her own monograph in 1984, which again critiqued *Joseiron*, with the title *Obasan no disukūru (The Discourse of Ladies)*.²³

Takahashi and Tsushima's intent, however, was not explicitly to belittle male writers, as was the aim of the feminist-led discussions by Ueno *et al*; they commence by discussing male writers who skilfully portray women (albeit as an 'object' not subject), and continue by talking about their own works, including Takahashi's 1976 work *Yūwakusha (The Seducer)* and Tsushima's 1978 work *Chōji (Child of Fortune)* and the themes and ideas that their female peers such as Ōba Minako and Saegusa Kazuko pursue relating to the formation of women's identity. It is notable that Takahashi here performs a complete *volte face* and either agrees with Tsushima, or herself asserts the following points: that having no individuality gives a woman ultimate strength, even 'independence'; that the impulse behind obedience to a higher power is effectively a 'physiological' drive and one which is familiar to all women (and, this time, she includes herself in such a category); that the female body is the source of the female intellect; and that women's writing, whether starkly intellectual or more aligned with the postwar carnal literature movement, emanates from their whole bodies.²⁴ Through their discussion, they create an image of 'woman' as stronger, more independent, and more deeply or internally connected to an intellect which has roots within their physiology than 'man'. By prioritising the body over the mind, and moreover imbuing the body with

²³ Kanai, M. *Obasan no disukūru* (Tokyo: Chikuma shobō, 1984).

²⁴ Takahashi and Tsushima 'Onna no sei to otoko no me', p. 8. Takahashi here argues: 'Chiteki ni hyōgen shiteiru baai ni mo, chiteki na mono ni nikutaiteki ni kakawatteiru' ('Even when I'm expressing myself intellectually, there's a corporeal element in my intellectual formulations') (trans. Maryellen Tomon Mori) 'Female Sexuality and the Male Gaze: A Dialogue between Takahashi Takako and Tsushima Yūko', p.125.

'intellectual' sensibilities, Takahashi and Tsushima usurp the usual modern hierarchical relationship of men and women, and of male and female writers. Moreover, by entering the ring of sharp, prosaic 'masculine' discourse and muddying the distinctions between mind and body, they lay claim to a subversive 'intellectual' territory (the female body) which excludes men, and thus they extend the boundaries of what 'being a woman', and moreover, 'being a woman writer', signifies.

Reconfiguring 'woman' as a hybrid of previously conceived 'masculine' and 'feminine' attributes is something which Kurahashi also manages in her essay 'Dokuyaku toshite no bungaku' ('Poisonous Literature', 1975).²⁵ While maintaining a tongue-in-cheek tone throughout, which pokes fun at the stereotyping of both sexes and ages, she writes:

In my twenties I had to write fiction as a hermaphrodite, somewhere between the 'girl' and 'young man', and perform the role of a 'young witch.' My fiction is therefore a cooperative work of this 'girl' and this 'young man.' However, one cannot be an authentic 'girl' after one turns twenty. Furthermore, the 'young man' is also the Other in myself, as I am not male. I have been growing the Other inside myself while writing fiction. The secret of my literature is, psychoanalytically speaking, the desire to become masculine.²⁶

Kurahashi's words, like Takahashi and Tsushima's discussion, insist on the blurring of genders (and in Kurahashi's case, ages) within subjectivities, and to this extent mount a challenge to gender essentialism. However, as all of these

²⁵ Kurahashi Yumiko, 'Dokuyaku toshite no bungaku' ['Poisonous Literature'] in *Dokuyaku toshite no bungaku* (Tokyo: Kōdansha bungei bunko, 1975) pp. 68-77.

²⁶ Ibid., pp. 68-69. The translation of this particular citation is taken from Sakaki Atsuko, 'Kurahashi Yumiko's Negotiations with the Fathers' (trans. Sakaki Atsuko) in *The Father-Daughter Plot: Japanese Literary Women and the Law of the Father*, ed. Rebecca L. Copeland and Esperanza Ramirez-Christensen (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2001) pp. 302-303.

writers set out to delineate new terms for what 'being a woman (writer)' signifies, they inevitably hold onto a distinction between the *two* genders, even if the two have become greatly complicated as categories. While Takahashi and Tsushima conclude that whether linguistically, sociologically or physically rooted, the differences between men and women are 'irreconcilable' (*dōshiyōmonai*), both Kurahashi and Takahashi in their respective essays reiterate that they themselves sought in some way to emulate men, or internalise and demonstrate an objectivity towards 'femaleness'.²⁷ The 1960s and 1970s thus heralded the rise of women's writing in Japan, and yet in attempting to define themselves and their purpose in writing, this movement arguably compounded notions of difference, and even at times reinstated a patriarchal hierarchy of terms wherein being 'masculine' not only equates to being possessed of 'intellectual' qualities, but also of an alleged 'superiority'.

Returning to Kanai, we can see that, in her comments about second-wave feminism and women's writing, for example, she interrogates the framework underpinning the question of what 'being a woman' signifies, and views the making of clear-cut distinctions between the genders with suspicion, even (perhaps particularly) if those distinctions are made by women. In 'What Are Women to a Woman', Kanai expresses her dislike of attempts to distinguish between male and female ways of writing about women and starts by taking Simone de Beauvoir to task for what Kanai perceives to be the former's pragmatic literary analysis of male writers that sought to expose gender

²⁷ See Takahashi and Tsushima, 'Onna no sei to otoko no me', p. 14; Kurahashi, 'Dokuyaku toshite no bungaku' p. 69. ('Danseika no ganbo, kore ga seishin bunsekiteki ni mita watashi no bungaku no himitsu nano desu' 'The secret of my literature is, psychoanalytically speaking, the desire to become masculine'); and Takahashi, 'Onnagirai', pp. 231-232.

inequality.²⁸ Kanai argues that Beauvoir's analysis seeks to condemn works from writers as diverse as Paul Claudel and André Breton over a single 'moralistic' point: that they depict women 'poetically' (as objects) and not 'realistically' in their works.²⁹ Kanai outlines how for her, Beauvoir's dislike of Breton's work *Nadia* appears to rest solely on the basis that Nadia is a woman, and that Beauvoir (or other female readers) are clearly women, yet the writer is a man who does not understand Nadia as Nadia would understand herself; Kanai notes it 'could almost be thought that [Beauvoir's] dissatisfaction arises from the fact that Nadia herself isn't the author' (*Najia jishin ga sakka denai koto ga, maru de fuman de aru ka no yō ni omowareru*).³⁰

This claim, which Kanai asserts Beauvoir makes, and which as we have noted above, both Takahashi and Tsushima make in their head-to-head discussion, that there is a women's writing that, because of its *authenticity*, can *realistically* represent women's experience, is a claim which reduces women's representation to the *literal*, to the *physical*, and here, to the *autobiographical*. It is precisely this which irritates Kanai because, one might argue, she views *all* written identities as verbal fabrications, as fictions. Her writings see gender essentialism as frustrating, even ridiculous, in its inability to appreciate 'fiction' or indeed utilise it as a creative space for the expansion and exploration of meaning and identity. Her 1972 essay continues:

²⁸ See the section 'Bōbowāru e no gimon' ('Questions for Beauvoir') in Kanai, 'Onna ni totte onna to wa nani ka', pp. 68-73.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 69-73.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 72.

When it is said that it is important that I, as a 'woman', should speak my experience while another 'woman' listens, this is probably because it is thought that by probing into this together as women, the problems that are presented by being a 'woman' become clear, whereas for men, behaviour such as probing into and narrating the experiences of the self is at once considered to be that of a novelist. Although male novelists who write about the experience of the self are not at all interesting, it is rather that the point of their writing is not limited to investigating such a thing as what it means to be a 'man'. Why is it that only women must continue to write about being a 'woman'? Is it perhaps because they have nothing better to write about?³¹

Kanai thus argues that those female narratives which explore personal experience (which here include both women sitting down in a round-table or head-to-head discussion, or narrating experiences in a realistic, confessional literary form, such as the *shishōsetsu* ('I novel')) always create a dichotomy by defining the 'self' against 'other' and therefore fall back on conventional patterns of expression. Moreover, whereas male writers are at least afforded a certain breadth of definition when discussing their individual identity against a plurality of other individuals and influences, in women's writing, this range of describing the 'self' is invariably limited to the task of picking out the differences between two gendered categories. Kanai's radical rejection and subversion of the system of modern dualistic signification in her early career correlate first to her identification of women's discussions of what it means to be a woman, and of realistic and confessional modes of fiction, as both operating within such a system, and second to her perception of women's writing as being even more reductive in inscribing the female self, than the conventional tropes and narrative clichés deployed by male writers.

³¹ Ibid., p. 73.

Kanai's Literary Critique of Gender Categories

A decade after Kanai's comments above, Karatani Kōjin identified the confessional mode as an origin of modern Japanese literature in his landmark work, *Nihon kindai bungaku no kigen* (*Origins of Modern Japanese Literature*).³² Karatani develops a post-structuralist reading of modern Japanese literature by asserting that the creation of modern subjectivity in Japan was constituted in language, and concomitant with a new mode of writing called *genbun itchi* (the unification of speech and writing) in late nineteenth-century Japan.³³ By mimicking the voice, *genbun itchi* in turn facilitated the concept of an 'interior self' (or inner voice). However, Karatani claims that the aim of *genbun itchi* was not to '[bring] "writing" (*bun*) into conformity with "speech" (*gen*), or speech into conformity with writing, as is usually maintained. Rather, *Genbun itchi* represented the invention of a new conception of writing as equivalent with speech.'³⁴ Moreover, as the mode of confession in literature necessarily entails the exploration of a set of supposedly hidden, private or repressed thoughts and feelings that are at odds with a person's external countenance, it thus became a vehicle for expressing the writer's 'interiority' and was fundamental for the fabrication of the modern subject in Japan.³⁵

³² Karatani Kōjin *Nihon Kindai Bungaku No Kigen* (Tokyo: Kodansha, 1980) translated as *Origins of Modern Japanese Literature*. trans. Brett de Bary (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1993).

³³ Karatani, *Origins of Modern Japanese Literature* (See Ch. 2, pp. 11-75 in particular.)

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 39.

³⁵ *Ibid.* (see: Ch. 3, pp. 76-96 in particular.)

Feminist critic Kano Ayako has since refuted the importance of 'interiority' for women's fiction.³⁶ Kano argues that, as Karatani's exploration of modern Japanese literature excludes female writers and fictional characters, the concept of 'interiority' is necessarily 'ungendered, but/and/therefore assumed to be male' and that Karatani 'avoids the question of how language and writing might construct subjectivity differently for women'.³⁷ Kano's thesis that women express, through literature, a different (modern) subjectivity to men, refers back to the same period of the early modernising and militarising Japanese state as Karatani, which she too considers fundamental for cultural, social and linguistic configurations. She writes that 'the modern nation-state produced the category of "woman" as quite separate from that of "man = human"' and points out that the two sexes were segregated, that women were subordinated to men and trained to be 'good wives, wise mothers', and used a different linguistic register to men, which defined their identity.³⁸ Kano thus suggests, as Takahashi also argues in 'Woman-hating', that this female register was, and continued to be, the locus of their (collective) identity and the cause of their subordination.³⁹

³⁶ Kano Ayako, 'Toward a Critique of Transhistorical Fertility', in *Gendering Modern Japanese History*, ed. Barbara Molony and Kathleen Uno (Harvard: Harvard University Asia Center, 2005) pp. 520-54.

³⁷ *Ibid.* pp. 525-526.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p.526.

³⁹ Tomioka Taeko, a famous woman writer and feminist commentator, also published an article in her serialised column in *Fujin kōron (Woman's Forum)* which discusses the differences between 'men's language' and 'women's language'. See Taeko Tomioka, "'Onna no kotoba" to "kuni no kotoba"', *Fujin kōron*, 7 (1983), 470-79; also translated as 'Woman's Language and the National Language: Tomioka Taeko' trans. Joan E. Ericson and Yoshiko Nagaoka in *Woman Critiqued*, ed. Rebecca Copeland (Hawai'i: University of Hawai'i Press, 2006) pp. 119-34. In this article Tomioka points out that,

And yet, if it is specifically women's register which is to be considered the key determining factor of women's subordination and therefore their lack of interiority, then surely the shift effected by the likes of Takahashi, Tsushima and Kurahashi into 'masculine' intellectual discourse, their appropriation and use of what they themselves term as 'masculine' forms of language, and their concomitant representations of 'bad wives and worse mothers' constituted not only their subversion of the patriarchal hierarchy but also the materialisation of their own (individual) interiority.⁴⁰ Indeed, Kurahashi's assertion that she had 'been growing the Other inside [herself] while writing fiction', and Takahashi and Tsushima's comments that their writing emanated from their entire bodies, all indicate that they conceived the origin of their writing as arising internally, and therefore as the manifestation of psychic 'interiority'. However, Kano does not touch upon this movement in women's literature, and her argument, by fixing on a single point in time and by not addressing subsequent evolutions of that language and subjectivity into the late twentieth century, is necessarily limited in scope in its concept of women's literature, and essentialist to the extent that it identifies an unchanging linguistic origin for women's identity.

whereas the former is used in formal situations such as news broadcasts and post-primary education, the latter encompasses regional dialect, and pertains to the individual's mother-tongue and advocates that, rather than attempting to master masculine language, women and speakers from regions with a strong dialect should form a kind of Esperanto, which can skilfully bridge the differences between the two.

⁴⁰ The introduction to Julia Bullock, *The Other Women's Lib: Gender and Body in Japanese Women's Fiction* (Hawai'i: University of Hawai'i Press, 2009) is entitled 'Bad Wives and Worse Mothers? Rewriting Femininity in Postwar Japan'. Bullock's thesis is that by creating protagonists who were 'bad wives and worse mothers' at a time when 'Japanese society was experiencing a resurgence of the prewar "good wife and wise mother" ideology', women writers (Bullock examines the works of Kono Taeko, Takahashi and Kurahashi) resisted normative gender roles, pre-empting, through literature, the Japanese women's liberation movement of the 1970s.

Surely the crux of the matter is that it is not the women's register that confines the woman when writing to a collective and subordinated identity; but, rather, as Kanai points out, it is the decision to speak and write collectively, in a representationalist idiom, which reifies the category of 'woman', and defines her in opposition to the category of 'man'. Most women writers around the time of Kanai's debut, even those who held an awareness of 'woman' as a constructed linguistic category, and who deployed elements of the fantastic and the surreal in their works such as Kurahashi, Takahashi and Tsushima, were, as we have been examining, involved in such projects through their essays and head-to-head discussions; certainly, Kanai's choice to refuse to engage in such endeavours, to reject the techniques and assumptions of realist fiction, and to resist being subsumed by any autobiographical (or pseudo-autobiographical) account of herself sets her apart from her contemporaries.⁴¹ Nevertheless, making this choice provided her with the opportunity to critique, rather than join in with the construction of the written feminine through her essays, and deconstruct, rather than reify, gender categories through her fiction.

But it is not just the decision to avoid certain representationalist modes of writing which distinguishes Kanai's early writings. It is also the notion that writing is 'fragmentary', both in the sense of its being an object which exists within a fragment of time and space, and in the sense that the process of writing simultaneously requires the writer's gathering of various texts and

⁴¹ Kanai does discuss her upbringing and its impact on her literature in Kanai Mieko, *Kanai Mieko shishū* [*Kanai Mieko: Collected Poetry*] Vol. 55, *Gendai shi bunko* (Tokyo: Shinchōsha, 1973) pp. 128-34. Even here, however, she starts with the disclaimer, 'jiden nado kaku ki wa mōtō nai' ('I have not a shred of desire to write a biography') and goes on to write about how she *doesn't* remember much about her young life (having burned all her diaries out of embarrassment). (See p.128.)

ideas (fragments) into a whole, and that the reader's reading and interpretation inevitably re-fragments those texts and ideas. This conception of the literary text (as discussed in greater detail in Chapter Three, where we term it 'the corporeal text') is evident within many of Kanai's early fictional works and non-fiction essays, and is the theme of her 1984 essay 'Kotoba/genjitsu/nikutai' (Text/Reality/The Body).⁴² It is also the persistent theme of her early poetry, including her 1968 debut poem 'Hanputi ni katarikakeru kotoba ni tsuite no omoimegurashi' ('A Journey of Thought Upon Humpty Dumpty's Narrative Train') which Suga Hidemi claimed 'encapsulated the ethos of the avant-garde'.⁴³ The poem begins:

Oh Humpty Dumpty!
 Oh! Poet
 Secretly I remember you.
 When the first mouthful of apricot tasting tobacco
 Is coughed up from my stomach,
 And a new sour granulation flutters on the edge of my stomach
 I think of you my darling.
 The word 'word', that unsolidifiable mucous
 Oh! Humpty, break it into pieces
 Go around the edge in reverse
 We see you falling!
 The word 'word' is yet again complicated
 Yet again dissected – by you!⁴⁴

⁴² 'Kotoba/genjitsu/nikutai', in *Obasan no disukūru* (Tokyo: Chikuma shobō, 1984) pp. 62-68.

⁴³ Hidemi Suga, 'Kanai Mieko, Hito to sakuhin', in *Shōwa bungaku zenshu* (Tokyo: Shōgakukan, 1988) pp. 961-64, p. 961.

⁴⁴ Kanai Mieko, 'Hanputi ni katarikakeru kotoba ni tsuite no omoimegurashi' ['A Journey of Thought Upon Humpty Dumpty's Narrative Train'] in *Kanai Mieko shishū*, Vol. 55, *Gendai shi bunko* (Tokyo: Shinchōsha, 1973) pp. 10-11.

Humpty Dumpty, of course, as he figures in Lewis Carroll's *Through the Looking Glass* (1872), claims to be the 'master' of words, and declares in his conversation with Alice 'When *I* use a word, [...] it means just what I choose it to mean – neither more nor less.'⁴⁵ To this, Alice replies 'The question is, [...] whether you *can* make words mean so many different things.'⁴⁶ Humpty interprets the first verse of the nonsensical 'Jabberwocky' (''Twas brillig, and the slithy toves ...' etc.) by claiming that many of the words are portmanteaus (with 'two meanings packed up into one word').⁴⁷ He also produces a poem of his own in which he describes attempting to convey an urgent message, but without ever divulging the message's content, thus ensuring the reader's focus is on the textual materiality of the message rather than on its referent, the message itself.⁴⁸ Kanai's poem recalls this by the speaker metaphorically inscribing her own phlegm, tasting as it does of the twin flavours of apricot and tobacco, as a physicalised metaphor for a portmanteau word (and hence reminding us, again, that words are not only descriptors of things, but also material entities in their own right) which then produces something new: 'a new sour granulation flutters on the edge of my stomach'. However, the speaker challenges the illusory wholeness of the lump of phlegm which, despite its physical presence, is nonetheless 'unsolidifiable'. Hence, we might read

⁴⁵ Lewis Carroll, *Through the Looking-Glass and What Alice Found There* (London: Macmillan London Limited, 1978) p. 130.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 130.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 133. (for instance 'slithy' means 'lithe and slimy')

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 'Jabberwocky' is on pp. 22-23, and Alice's full encounter with Humpty Dumpty is described in Chapter 6, pp. 119 – 42.

Humpty Dumpty himself, as he is figured in the poem, as a metaphor for a postmodern, avant-garde textuality, and whom, owing to our prior knowledge of his fall, we always already know to be an embodiment of fragments. The poem invokes his inevitable fall, prompting the reader to imagine his fracturing and reconstitution and this is, perhaps, readable as an extended metaphor for our losing grasp of concepts (the fall), their becoming complicated (fractured), and finally our re-constituting their meaning. Moreover, precisely because Kanai's texts hold an awareness of identity as being contingent on words and our understanding of them, this process relates to the underpinning formation of our own identities which is in constant process of being undone and reimagined. Mary Knighton writes that for early wave feminists (feminists for whom gender inequality *was* an empirical fact which they wished to overturn or write against), Kanai's early approach alienated them.⁴⁹ Because Kanai's writings were perceived as dismissive of prevalent sexist practices and ideas perpetuated by *men* by the status quo that *was*, they were felt to be too lofty and abstruse to function usefully as a feminist critique. Yet Kanai's writings show clearly an awareness that women were responsible for the formation of their identities and part of her own 'practical' solution was to question women writers' signification of 'woman' through her non-fiction. In her early fiction, accordingly, woman is often depicted in graphic terms as a material, corporeal and sexual entity, whose reality is often stark, peculiar and lonely, while at the

⁴⁹ Mary Knighton, 'Writing the Body as Meat: Kanai Mieko's "Rotting Meat" as Surreal Fable', in *Japanese Studies around the World 2004: Observing Japan from Within: Perspectives of Foreign Scholars Resident in Japan*, ed. James Baxter (International Research Centre for Japanese Studies, 2004) pp. 161-88, p. 164, n. 8.

same time this depiction of woman is satirised, critiqued and deconstructed through her narratives' use of black humour and metafictional technique.

Because of this, the four critics whose detailed analyses of 'Rabbits' and 'Rotting Meat' are discussed in detail below each interpret the feminism (or non-feminism) of Kanai's writing very differently. However, all of their interpretations examine the extent to which the stories support what I term a 'materialist feminist perspective', by depicting the literal, physical oppression, privation and disenfranchisement of female sexuality. These readings also consider the extent to which these stories support what I broadly term a 'post-structuralist feminist perspective', by, for instance, effecting a 'victory' for feminism(s) through the narrative's use of language. Predominance of one of these two positions is then given over the other as each of these critics reaches their respective conclusion. But before we discuss these critical responses in detail, we might note that a brief account of each story which focuses on the central female characters' narrative amply demonstrates a materialist feminist reading. In both of their narratives, the subversiveness of the female characters' modes of being and living inexorably leads to their isolation and/or death, appearing to suggest that woman's physical oppression and marginalisation is the price to be paid for transgressing patriarchal values and rules. And yet an equally brief consideration of the anonymous frame narratives around the internal female characters' stories permits a post-structuralist feminist reading by exposing all narrative as fiction, and moreover fiction which delights in upturning narratives of female subjugation.

In 'Rotting Meat', for example, the ageing prostitute whose first-person narrative constitutes the bulk of the story, relates that she has never desired a

conventional married life and has been happy servicing her many customers, all of whom repay her with either gifts or money which they tactfully stuff in the base of the bedside lamp. However, one day she attracts the attentions of a butcher, who is so violent in his use of her body that she becomes too tired to continue seeing her other customers. To her distaste (because it seems to comment on her profession too directly) and inconvenience, the butcher leaves her a piece of meat (indeed, a whole piglet) in return for her services. Not knowing what to do with it, she stuffs it under the bed. However, so forceful is the butcher in his intent to marry her, a fate she resists, not because she doesn't love him, but because she feels marriage constitutes a pretence, that she feels impelled to kill him. When the anonymous framing narrator (known to us only by the masculine first-person pronoun *boku*) realises that the stench of rotting meat that had been bothering him ever since he entered her room is emanating from the butcher and not the piglet, he flees, leaving her alone in a closet, in a foul-smelling apartment, with a rotting corpse under her mattress. This sense of the woman's isolation is heightened by *boku's* assertion that he knew that 'leaving here means never being able to return' (*koko o dechimaeba, nido to koko ni modotte kuru koto ga dekinakunaru koto*).⁵⁰

It is comparatively straightforward, then, as we assemble a putative materialist feminist reading of 'Rotting Meat' which aims to illustrate how the story describes (albeit allegorically) how women are oppressed within a hegemonic patriarchal order, to account for the prostitute's actions in terms of their being *transgressive* as they are an affront: to the senses (the act of living

⁵⁰ Kanai Mieko, 'Funiku', *Kanai Mieko: Zentanpenshū* Vol. 1 (Tokyo: Nihon bungeisha, 1992) pp. 515-21, p. 515.

with the stench of a corpse); to conventional bourgeois sensibilities (opposing marriage in favour of taking multiple sexual partners); or to a broader socioethical code (committing murder). Even the notion that the woman is no longer young, which is suggested by the metaphor for 'ageing prostitute' implicit in the title 'Rotting Meat', can be taken as an affront to conventional literary notions of feminine sexual desirability.⁵¹ A feminist interpretation focused on the realities of female subjugation and oppression thus may conclude that the inevitable, even tragic, consequences of these multiple acts of transgression might then be the prostitute's exile from a surrounding social framework that cannot accommodate her.

However, this feminist reading is complicated not only by the farcical, surrealist and comedic qualities of the woman's narrative, qualities which render attempts to read it as a serious commentary on women's subjugation problematic, but also by the narrative of the frame narrator, *boku*, through whom her story is told. He introduces her tale by informing the reader, enigmatically, that, 'I knew that once I had left [the woman's room], even if I tried searching, I wouldn't even be able to find the estate agent who had shown me around'.⁵² Her tale is then narrated up to the point where the woman explains how she has been given a piglet by the butcher, which she has stuffed under the bed. The narrative then returns to *boku* who relates how the woman does not seem to lament her current situation, but instead talks about her

⁵¹ Indeed, this implied metaphor is rendered explicit during the course of the story, when the prostitute herself discusses *niku* (meat) as being coterminous for both the dead flesh of animals and for the body of prostitutes.

⁵² Kanai, 'Funiku', p. 515.

memories of all the various men she has had in her bed until the sun sets. He then explains how he has stumbled across her. Of course, originally he wanted 'a house' of his own, but realising this was an overreaching ambition, he decides to settle for a 'room'.⁵³ He explains that upon finding this room, it was his wish to do absolutely nothing:

Once there, I would live... no, I would do nothing, absolutely nothing, I intended to live as simply as possible. The truth was that I wanted to run away from writing; run to the very polar of not writing, and live life poised for death to come in the guise of a young girl exactly like me, but a thousand times more beautiful.⁵⁴

He finds an estate agent, whose breath stinks badly of rotting meat and he rents a furnished room. *Boku* doesn't realise that the room itself had smelt so badly until his nose, which had been paralysed by the bad breath of the estate agent, recovers in the middle of the night. On searching for the smell he opens up the closet only to find the woman lying on a double bed inside. He interrupts her story to attempt to persuade her of his situation, namely, that it is now his room, but she takes no notice and simply tells him that he has been tricked by the estate agent, who, she explains, is her pimp. When *boku* asks whether it is the rotting piglet causing the terrible smell, the woman replies that they had eaten that long ago, and that it was coming from the butcher who has asked her to marry him, a request which forces her to kill him. She pulls back the cover to reveal what we now realise to be the source of the smell of rotting meat: the butcher's rotting corpse. At this point *boku* flees, but regrets this, explaining

⁵³ Ibid., p. 518.

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 518.

that ever since then he has been attempting to go back, find and marry her, and become a slice of rotting meat to be digested through her intestines. It is this reverie that fills him with warmth. However, recently he gets the feeling that he too is rotting from the innards, and this smell is mixed with his breath to the point where it makes him nauseous.

Similarly, it is relatively simple to construct a post-structuralist feminist reading of 'Rotting Meat' which aims to illustrate how the story subverts narratives of woman's subjugation, instead enabling her revenge upon men through the use of language. By explaining that the woman exists in a space ('her room') for which he has no material evidence or connection (doubting even that he would be able to find the estate agent), and to which he can never physically return, *boku's* introduction to the story has the effect of removing the woman's story from any plane of realisticness. Instead, the prostitute's story is rendered a figment of his mind and the subject of his writing; far from representing woman's material condition, it becomes a fiction; its status as a narrative becomes heightened. Moreover, as *boku* states that it is his desire 'to run to the very polar of not writing', we might infer that at present he is unable to escape writing.⁵⁵ (Indeed, any narrative that tries to relate the narrator's escape from writing, fails by definition). Thus, her narrative could be construed as *boku's* allegory for, and commentary upon the process of writing. In this allegory, her ageing body represents the writing body, which plays host to numerous 'guests', or narratives whose stories she must write. The survival of the writing body is threatened when one particular narrative (the butcher)

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 518.

overwhelms her, consuming all her energy, and preventing her from attending to any other narratives (or guests). In order to physically survive as a writer the prostitute must therefore 'kill' the butcher and turn him into 'rotting meat' (the very thing that has hitherto denoted *her*) so that his narrative becomes subsumed into hers. The fact that *boku* also becomes consumed by her and notices his innards turning into rotting meat could be considered to represent the way in which the woman, or writing body, has taken revenge, even on the supposed governing narrator of her story. Indeed, considered in the light of women's writing in the 1970s which, as we have seen, reclaims the female body as a subversive intellectual territory, the short story can be thus read as an allegory that affirms this by depicting woman as not only able to narrate her own narratives about men, but also able to infiltrate, and eventually assume control over masculine narratives about her. An interpretation of this short story, focused on the need for woman's reclamation of the manner in which narratives are told, might thus conclude, in complete contradiction to the materialist feminist interpretation, that the voice of the woman-as-writer is, if not dominant, then a constant source of destabilisation for the man-as-narrator.

The same potential to elicit contrasting feminist readings exists through the dual narratives in 'Rabbits' which again presents us with a secondary but central female narrator within a frame provided by an anonymous primary narrator. In 'Rabbits', it is the first person narrative of the '*shōjo*' (a young woman, or girl⁵⁶) called Sayuri (Little Lily) which, like the prostitute's

⁵⁶ The term *shōjo* specifically describes females between the ages of early puberty, until their coming of age at twenty, or their marriage; therefore *shōjo* is sometimes translated as 'girl', and sometimes as 'young woman'. In 'Rabbits' the *shōjo* is still at

narrative in 'Rotting Meat', constitutes the bulk of the story and relates Sayuri's progressive estrangement from society. Sayuri's deviance from conventional life commences with her twice-monthly enjoyment of feasting with her father on the rabbits which he rears, slaughters, stuffs and cooks. These feasts, and the killings that they necessitate, repulse her mother and brother to such a degree that they leave the family home. Free to enjoy such indulgences at home, the father and Sayuri stop going to work and school, and concentrate on creating a new culinary speciality every day. The father soon becomes so obese that he is bed-ridden, and the *shōjo* takes on his role, which she has hitherto just observed, of slaughtering the rabbits. Although she at first finds this task disgusting, she soon derives great pleasure from it, and ends up performing the ritual naked, even bathing in the blood of the rabbits and rubbing it into her pubic hair. She creates a rabbit suit out of the skins with the design to surprise her father on his birthday; she practices hopping around like a rabbit; and writes a placard that reads 'stuff me and eat me please'.⁵⁷ But on seeing Sayuri in her costume, the father thinks she is the ghost of all of the rabbits he has killed resurrected to kill him. He throws an alarm clock at her which shatters her pink sunglasses, piercing and blinding one of her eyes. He then suffers a heart attack and dies, leaving Sayuri alone. She is transfixed by the sight of herself with one eye gouged out and consequently decides to take out the eyes

school, and prepares a special meal for her and her father of *sekihan* (rice with red beans, traditionally eaten to mark a young woman's first menstruation) and decorates the table with strawberries and radishes after discovering that her mother and brother have left, which suggests that she started menstruating that day. As the term *shōjo* can be applied to a female throughout the period in which the body transitions from being a girl, or child, into a woman, it holds the connotations of 'metamorphic power' and for this reason occupies a special cultural and literary status in Japan.

⁵⁷ Kanai Mieko, 'Rabbits', *Kanai Mieko: Zentanpenshū* Vol. 1 (Tokyo: Nihon bungeisha, 1992) pp. 522-40, p. 536. .

of all of the rabbits. When the primary narrator locates the *shōjo* again, she is lying dead in her rabbit suit, in her house, which is now lined from wall to wall with white rabbit fur, and surrounded by blind rabbits. Her lips are curled into a smile, having pierced her other eye and completely blinded herself.

As with 'Rotting Meat', the process of constructing a putative materialist feminist reading of 'Rabbits' by identifying the transgressiveness of Sayuri's acts, and illustrating the manner in which they contribute to her isolation from a wider social fabric, and hence to her tragic demise, is relatively straightforward. Sayuri's enjoyment first of the eating, and then of the slaughtering of sweet and innocent animals which a girl her age might, more conventionally, keep as pets, acts to destabilise any socio-cultural belief that ordinary schoolgirls might themselves, like their rabbits, be sweet and innocent. Sayuri acknowledges:

Thinking back, until the fourteenth of the month several years ago, I lived as a normal human being. Until that time, I was like any other regular schoolgirl, I did everything to hide my father's strange tastes – the fact that he killed and cooked rabbits – although I can't say that I don't feel slightly guilty about having eaten them. If my classmates had known that I had eaten rabbits which I had raised myself without turning a hair they would surely have nicknamed me 'Tiger Lily'. Yes, I have lost one eye, but they are completely blind; even hearing the word 'kill' would turn the colour on the dull, expression-less faces of those stupid donkey-like girls.⁵⁸

Expressing her fundamental disassociation with her contemporaries, Sayuri describes them as '*baka na roba no yō na shōjotachi*' (stupid donkey-like girls).⁵⁹ However, instead of using the most commonly used characters for

⁵⁸ Kanai, 'Usagi', p. 538.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 538.

donkey (驢馬) or its equally common transliteration into katakana (ロバ), she uses the characters '兎馬' (*lit.* 'rabbit-horse'), indicating the reading 'roba' in furigana over the top.⁶⁰ By equating her school friends to the passive, unknowing rabbits that she kills and eats, Sayuri's transgression in killing and eating rabbits is symbolically elevated to murder and cannibalism. Her further transgression of staying at home with her father in order to indulge in their deviant pastime actively completes this disassociation between herself and her peers, removing her completely from their wider social sphere. But over and above her violence towards innocence, the sexual nature of her enjoyment (at first connoted through her depiction of the voluptuousness of feasting, and later made more explicit, even cruel, in her naked performance of her ritual slaughtering of the rabbit) renders her actions pornographically obscene. And then there is the suggestion, for instance, through Sayuri's complicity with her father's 'strange tastes', their shared delight in the sensuous act of eating, and most of all in her attempts to surprise him by dressing up as a rabbit for him to 'stuff' and 'eat' on his birthday, that her sexual desire is directed towards her father (although its consummation is never made explicit), and is therefore transgressive in the sense that it gestures towards that which Claude Levi-Strauss identified as the founding taboo of modern society, incest.⁶¹ As it is a narrative about incestuous desire, an interpretation of the *shōjo's* narrative in 'Rabbits' might contend that the story is a feminist rewriting of Oedipus, and Sayuri's exile from society, her putting out her own eyes and her subsequent

⁶⁰ Owing to its long ears, another term for 'donkey' in Japanese is *usagiuma* (*lit.* rabbit-horse).

⁶¹ Claude Levi-Strauss, *The Elementary Structures of Kinship* trans. John von Sturmer James Bell, and Rodney Needham (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969).

death are all metaphorical for the tragic, yet inevitable, consequences of woman's transgression of patriarchal laws.

However, as with 'Rotting Meat', any attempts to read the *shōjo's* narrative as a serious commentary on women's subjugation are rendered problematic both by its surrealism and black humour, but also by the narrative of the frame narrator, who this time is both anonymous and ambiguous of gender, deploying as it does the gender-neutral first person pronoun *watashi*. *Watashi* commences the story by making an entry into a diary, which reads:

The act of writing includes not writing, but above all writing, therefore there is no escape; to write must be my fate.⁶²

S/he then decides to go for a walk to cure an on-going condition of being assailed by a feeling as if living in a waking nightmare. *Watashi* explains that this feeling is formless like a smell, or more specifically, a 'kind of nausea' in that it seems to be arising from her/his body.⁶³ It is while *watashi* is sitting down to rest on a rock that s/he sees a large rabbit, which is approximately the same size as herself/himself run past. *Watashi* runs after the rabbit before falling down a hole. On gaining consciousness *watashi* realises the rabbit is sitting nearby and staring at her/him. On questioning and scrutinising this rabbit a little more, it becomes apparent that the rabbit is actually a girl dressed in a rabbit suit. *Watashi* asks how she became a rabbit, and the girl then narrates her story. When *watashi* stumbles across the rabbit girl again she is dead in the woods having blinded herself in the other eye. *Watashi* dresses in

⁶² Kanai, 'Usagi', p. 522.

⁶³ Ibid., p. 523.

the rabbit suit and ‘remained still and did not try to move’ (*jittoshita mama ugokō to shinakatta*).⁶⁴

Thus, as with ‘Rotting Meat’, the process of constructing a post-structuralist feminist reading of ‘Rabbits’ by identifying the manner in which woman’s subjugation within a system of patriarchal dominance is overturned by her reclamation of language is largely uncomplicated. As was noted above with regard to the frame narrator in ‘Rotting Meat’, the frame narrator in ‘Rabbits’ serves to remove the internal female narrative from the plane of the literal and real, thereby heightening its status as narrative. That the frame narrator’s function is to convert the material to the fictional is at first intimated through the symbolism which surrounds her/him; *watashi* experiences her/his body through sensations and smells akin to nausea, thus transfiguring the physiological into that which is ‘formless’ and potentially imaginary or fantastical. *Watashi*’s narrative also effects this conversion by mimicking the famous opening of Lewis Carroll’s *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* in which Alice sees a rabbit, chases after it, and falls down a hole, when introducing the *shōjo*. This seems to suggest that, like Alice, the narrator of ‘Rabbits’ is in a waking dream, and the ‘wonderland’ that s/he is navigating (the world of the *shōjo* and her narrative) is part of that dream. This suggestion is reinforced by the way in which *watashi* (again in similarity to *boku* in ‘Rotting Meat’) informs us that s/he is a writer; that, ‘to write must be my fate’.⁶⁵ Thus, the story of the *shōjo*’s transition into a rabbit via her raising, eating and killing of rabbits and

⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 540.

⁶⁵ Ibid., p 522.

eventual attempted seduction of her father, can be read as the fiction of our frame narrator, and the very graphic and realistic depictions of events that lead to Sayuri's sad isolation from the world, rather than pertaining to woman's 'literal' alienation and subjugation within a patriarchal social order, instead pertain to figments of the writer's imagination. The notion that the *shōjo* and her life are symbolic of the life that a writer chooses is suggested by the way in which *watashi* climbs into her rabbit suit at the end of the short story and remains still. Thus again, as was the case with 'Rotting Meat', a post-structuralist feminist interpretation focused on the frame narrative's fictionalisation of the internal narrative may conclude the very reverse of a materialist feminist interpretation and assert that the short story affirms how female identities, such as the *shōjo*'s, elude their inscription as victims within a patriarchal hegemony through the act of writing. As is evident from these brief synopses and the corresponding materialist and post-structuralist analyses which arise from them, the form of these stories seems to encourage polarised readings through their use of external and internal narrators, and thus sets up paradoxes between the material and the figurative which seem irresolvable. So, how have the four main critics of these narratives interpreted them, and in what way have they considered them to be (or not to be) 'feminist'?

Kitada Sachie is the first of these four critics to place Kanai's early writings in general (and 'Rabbits' specifically) within a feminist framework. In 1993 Kitada notes, as our materialist feminist reading above has outlined, how the *shōjo* narrator's various acts of transgression result in her increasing isolation: alienating her mother and brother; separating her from her

classmates; and killing her father.⁶⁶ However, she does not read this trajectory as one which suggests woman's experience of violent marginalisation in response to her transgressions of patriarchal rules, but as an allegory for the *shōjo*'s emancipation through fiction. She points out that the *shōjo* is a feminine literary trope which represents an androgynous, unconscious, pre-sexualised state of being, and therefore engenders the possibilities of transformation and metamorphosis.⁶⁷ This is a point which Kitada expands in her 1996 essay, in which she argues that in Kanai's early non-fiction, Kanai selects the trope of the *shōjo* as a means to overcome the limitations imposed upon women living in patriarchal societies.⁶⁸ Thus, for Kitada, Sayuri's transformation is a positive event, which demonstrates how it is possible to retrieve an active identity, realise profound personal fulfilment and discover a positive sexuality via initiation into the world of fantasy and literary creation. She concludes her 1993 essay by writing that Sayuri's disassociation with her contemporaries, her mother, brother and the silent 'rabbits' parallels Kanai's disaffection with conventional society and its options, and that Sayuri's transformation can also be expressed as a profound personal 'awakening' (*jikaku*), similar to that which

⁶⁶ Kitada Sachie, 'Usagi: Hito to bungaku', in *Tanpen josei bungaku: Gendai*, ed. Yabu Teiko, Watanabe Sumiko and Imai Yasuko (Tokyo: Ōfū, 1993) pp. 153-60. Kitada numbers Sayuri's acts of transgression from one to five, linking them to events which increase her isolation. See pp. 158 - 9.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 160.

⁶⁸ Kitada Sachie, 'Kanai Mieko ni okeru "shōjo" to "boken"', in *Haha to musume no feminizumu: Gendai kazoku o koete*, ed. Kitada Sachie, Mizuta Noriko and Hasegawa Hiroshi (Tokyo: Tahata Shōten, 1996) pp. 140-56.

Kanai experienced in wanting to pursue a solitary life of writing at the age of nineteen.⁶⁹

In contrast, Sharalyn Orbaugh's 1996 article, 'The Body in Contemporary Japanese Women's Fiction', which has been greatly influential in anglophone universities, uses the examples of 'Rabbits' and 'Rotting Meat', along with 'The Return' and 'A Figure of Mother and Child', to argue, as our materialist feminist interpretation above sets out, that Kanai's early short-fiction uses allegory to foreground the material damage suffered by women through the body by their role in sustaining patriarchal rule.⁷⁰ She writes:

Kanai's stories do not propose a *model* for women's reclamation of a specifically female-subjectivity and centrality; we are not being asked to empower ourselves by dressing up in rabbit suits and fantasizing about how daddy will kill and eat us. [...] The women in these stories do not fulfil some (Judeo Christian) romantic ideal of escape and healing. But by appropriating aspects of the gender-based power economies and inverting them, collapsing them, twisting them, and particularly by *exaggerating* them through rendering them literal, Kanai [among others] makes obvious the grotesqueries, absurdities, and actual dangers to women that are glossed over by abstract, intellectualized narratives of power. ⁷¹

For Orbaugh, Kanai's narratives contribute to feminism chiefly in their detailing the complex implications for all women and their bodies who live within a global culture structured through patriarchal economies of power. However, here Orbaugh is careful to state that they do so without resorting to the simplistic equation that women are the victims and men are the victimisers,

⁶⁹ Kitada, 'Usagi: Hito to bungaku', p. 159.

⁷⁰ Sharalyn Orbaugh, 'The Body in Contemporary Women's Fiction', in *The Woman's Hand: Gender and Theory in Japanese Women's Writing*, ed. Paul and Walker Schalow, Janet (Stanford, California.: Stanford University Press, 1996) pp. 119-64.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p.153.

which, she asserts, is ‘ultimately not useful [to feminism], except insofar as it keeps us from forgetting specific instances of injustice’.⁷² In so doing, she states, Kanai’s works should be considered alongside the works of other Japanese women writers (Orbaugh mentions Kōno Taeko, Ōba Minako, Ariyoshi Sawako, Takahashi Takako, Kurahashi Yumiko, Tomioka Taeko, Tsushima Yūko) who also write about the body in a way that involves it ‘directly and violently’ during the 1960s and 1970s.⁷³ In stories by these writers, women’s subversion of patriarchy resides in their return to (and therefore their re-appropriation of power over) the personal and the physical, and in their challenge to the gender hierarchy through performance. Orbaugh notes, ‘[i]nstead of being silent, women can speak; instead of being the objects of others’ gaze, they can use their eyes; instead of being killed, they can kill; instead of being dominated, they can dominate.’⁷⁴ She balances her materialist feminist reading with the statement that these literary subversions are not necessarily *tragic* because they install a lasting reversal of gender hierarchies within the realm of fantasy and fiction. Nonetheless, she concludes, they are at best ‘equivocal’ victories, and serve to illustrate how both ‘men and women are still relentlessly trapped within [patriarchal power structures]’.⁷⁵

In her 2004 paper on ‘Rotting Meat’, Mary Knighton counters Orbaugh’s materialist feminist reading of Kanai’s early short fiction by instead putting forward a poststructuralist feminist reading, and arguing that Kanai’s works

⁷² Ibid., p. 154.

⁷³ Ibid., p. 127.

⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 123.

⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 154.

achieve their relevance to feminism, not in the graphic depiction of the literal and the physical, but through their reclamation of woman's access to the mind and to language, within a context of war between male and female definitions:

Orbaugh writes that writers such as Kanai write social critique of gender relations by making 'the body' literal in their texts, an effective means of countering the intellectual abstraction of (male) 'narratives of power'. As a feminist literary critic myself, I sympathize with the desire to make women writers' fiction socially 'useful' for feminist politics, but in the case of Kanai I would have to question this particular project: that is, it is not in making 'the body' literal that Kanai subverts patriarchal power or narrative structures but in writing the female body 'as meat' – not at all 'literal,' as Orbaugh suggests, but rather well within the domain of the Symbolic and signification's endless proliferation and regeneration of signifiers – that Kanai refuses to give up the female mind's access to language in exchange for the plenitude of 'the body.'⁷⁶

For Knighton, Orbaugh's interpretation of the conclusion of 'Rotting Meat' as an ultimately unhappy one for the prostitute (who ends up stuck in a wardrobe with a piece of rotting meat under her bed) does not do justice to Kanai's project to challenge the gender hierarchy through language. By considering the short story's use of metonymy and metaphor, Knighton instead illustrates how the woman is able to exact her revenge on a Levi-Straussian homosocial economy of exchange in which she is configured as an object. For instance, Knighton points out that 'rotting meat' at first denotes the woman (by seeming to be *her* smell), but by the end of her narrative we realise it refers to the butcher she murdered who is rotting under her bed, and even to the male frame narrator, whose innards are rotting, and whose mouth is therefore made to

⁷⁶ Mary Knighton, 'Writing the Body as Meat: Kanai Mieko's "Rotting Meat" as Surreal Fable', in *Japanese Studies around the World 2004. Observing Japan from Within: Perspectives of Foreign Scholars Resident in Japan*, ed. James Baxter (International Research Centre for Japanese Studies, 2004) pp. 161-88, p. 177.

‘savor of her own pungently “meaty” presence’.⁷⁷ The rotting of the frame narrator’s innards, Knighton posits, is metaphorical for how the woman has taken over the telling of his story, and has thus managed, through language, to reformulate her relationship within the economy of exchange so that she is the victor.

The final of the four critics of these stories, Takeuchi Kayō, balances materialist and post-structuralist readings throughout, but her conclusion supports a materialist reading of Kanai’s literature. She commences her 2008 essay by pointing out how, from the very beginning of her career, Kanai was openly critical of the divisive language used both by the Japanese women’s lib movement and in contemporary discursive constructions of ‘woman’.⁷⁸ Thus, she asserts, citing from two different sources, Kanai can be considered as ‘unconnected’ (*muen*) to feminism, and should instead be thought of as ‘an investigator of gender who uses independent methods’ (*dokuji no hōhō ni tatsu jendā no tankyūsha*).⁷⁹ Instead, Takeuchi argues, ‘Rabbits’ is better considered

⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 179.

⁷⁸ Takeuchi Kayō, ‘Kanai Mieko “Usagi” o meguru kuia – “shōjo” no monogatari kara “watashi” no monogatari e’, *Shōwa bungaku kenkyū* 2008, pp. 163-84, p. 163.

⁷⁹ Takeuchi writes: ‘From the time that she made her debut, [Kanai] was “unconnected” to “the school of “feminism”, being “an investigator of gender who used independent methods”’. ([Kanai] wa debyū tōsho kara, “feminizumu” naru ryūha to wa’ ‘muen’ no ‘dokuji no hōhō ni tatsu jendā no tankyūsha’ de atta’). Ibid., p. 163. In this statement, Takeuchi picks out quotes from two major critics on Kanai in Japan who are actually at odds with each other in their interpretations of her works and their relation to feminism. Interestingly, the first two citations here (that Kanai was ‘unconnected’ to ‘the school of “feminism”’) are taken from Suga Hidemi, ‘Kanai Mieko: Hito to sakuhin’ [‘Kanai Mieko: People and Art’] in *Shōwa bungaku zenshū* (Tokyo: Shōgakusan, 1988) pp. 961-64, in which Suga praises Kanai’s literary achievements, which he claims transcend all transient literary trends such as ‘feminism’. The second citation here, that Kanai is ‘an investigator of gender who used independent methods’, is from Kitada, ‘Kanai Mieko ni okeru “shōjo” to “boken”’, p.144. However, in her 1993 paper, Kitada criticises Suga for his comment that Kanai was ‘unconnected’ to

as an early example of 'queer literature'.⁸⁰ Takeuchi then proceeds to analyse Sayuri's acts of transgression by applying Butler's theory of performativity (in which the founding principles of 'queer theory' are set out)⁸¹ and seeks to demonstrate, at first similarly to Orbaugh, how the *shōjo*'s activities can be viewed as gender performances which reverse, thereby posing a challenge to, patriarchal configurations. However, Takeuchi takes Orbaugh's line of argument further to contend, for instance, that the *shōjo*'s assumption of the father's role in butchering the rabbits, and subsequent transition to a performed passivity in dressing up for her father as a rabbit 'demonstrates the transformability and plurality of gender and disrupts the binaries of modern patriarchy' (*jendā no kahensei/tayōsei o shimeshi, nibunhōkihan o kakuran suru*).⁸² Sayuri's repeated transgressions thus 'deconstruct the fixedness of identity' (*aidentitī no koteisei o datsukōchiku suru*).⁸³ But Takeuchi does not wish to read Sayuri's transgressive actions simply as the actions of a subversive woman, because this would be to reassert the existence of the gender binaries

feminism and describes his understanding of feminism as 'shallow'. (See Kitada, 'Usagi: Hito to bungaku', p. 156.)

⁸⁰ Takeuchi, 'Kanai Mieko "Usagi" o meguru kuia - "shōjo" no monogatori kara "watashi" no monogatari e', p. 164. Takeuchi explains that the term 'queer', originally meaning 'strange' or 'weird', used to be a derogatory term for gay men in the UK, but that from the 1990s it was reappropriated by the gay community. Eventually the term infiltrated the mainstream, even being used by academia for studies that investigate gay and lesbian cultures, and the challenges that they, and feminist writers, make to heterosexual, patriarchal hegemonies.

⁸¹ According to Judith Butler's theory of performativity, subjectivity (and therefore, gender) is not fixed or pre-determined, but established and re-established through every *performance*, which includes every gesture and speech act that the individual makes.

⁸² Takeuchi, 'Kanai Mieko "Usagi" o meguru kuia - "shōjo" no monogatori kara "watashi" no monogatari e', pp. 163-64.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 164.

that Kanai's text appears so keen to dismantle. Takeuchi instead emphasises how, in 'Rabbits', it is the *shōjo's* over-active sexuality (illustrated by her taking over of the butchering role), and *not* her gender, which governs her behaviour and leads to her isolation.⁸⁴ Therefore, Takeuchi contends, the *shōjo* in this work should be considered a motif for queer identity. Furthermore, she argues, the frame narrator *watashi's* genderlessness and anonymity enables her/him to assume different genders and identities, and therefore s/he should also be considered a motif for queer identity. The frame narrator's alignment with 'queer' identities is further confirmed by the way in which s/he dresses in the *shōjo's* rabbit suit. To conclude, Takeuchi argues that 'the scarred body of the *shōjo* and the silence of the rabbits are symbolic of oppression and defeat' and therefore that 'Rabbits' serves to highlight the literal, physical and material damage done to dispossessed genders and sexualities, illustrating the oppressiveness of patriarchy.⁸⁵

Finally, in the most recent critical reading of 'Rabbits', Knighton responds to interpretations of the trope of the *shōjo* which, she contends, have been 'neatly polarized' into those who reject 'the angry, demonic, and vengeful "girl" as the true literary and cultural-historical version of Japan's *shōjo*', and those who revel in this image.⁸⁶ 'Rabbits', she asserts, is a work which complicates this debate by revealing the *shōjo* to be as innocent as she is grotesque and perverse, and thus reclaims a fuller range of terms through

⁸⁴ Ibid., See pp. 167-168.

⁸⁵ Ibid., pp. 170-171.

⁸⁶ Mary Knighton, 'Down the Rabbit Hole: In Pursuit of Shōjo Alices, from Lewis Carroll to Kanai Mieko', *U.S.-Japan Women's Journal* 40 (2011), 49-89. pp. 50 – 51.

which to represent her, illustrating again that Kanai's feminist agency is achieved through her skilful deployment of language. And yet, Knighton explains, textual analysis of 'Rabbits' has hitherto also been polarised into those critics who frame the *shōjo's* narrative as one of 'sweetly erotic' desire (*Eros*), and those who frame it as 'sacrificial desire' (*pathos*).⁸⁷ Further, regardless of which emphasis critics elect, all readings have interpreted the *shōjo's* sexuality as the result of 'the violent "repression" of incest or rape'.⁸⁸ However, Knighton argues, the narrative of the *shōjo* expresses, rather than represses, her story of incest; it is 'an open secret' for anyone who can read the signs.⁸⁹ As incest is not always the same story, these signs are important to understanding the *shōjo's* plight, and through reading them it is possible to discover what kind of story of incest the *shōjo* wishes to tell. Knighton's article also points out many ways in which Kanai (along with other members of the 1970s Japanese avant-garde scene) recycles symbolism from *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, and, in contrast to Kitada who stresses the differences between Alice and the *shōjo* in 'Rabbits', highlights the parallels between the two girls, writing that 'Rabbits' implements the 'return of Alice'.⁹⁰ For instance, just as some of the imagery in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* explicitly sexualises Alice (as exemplified by her sexualised association with the striking red Tiger Lily) so too, Kanai's 'Rabbits' charts the *shōjo's* transition into a 'Demonic Tiger

⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 50.

⁸⁸ Ibid., p. 50.

⁸⁹ Ibid., p. 60.

⁹⁰ Ibid., See pp. 61–66.

Lily', who bathes in the blood of the innocent rabbits.⁹¹ Knighton thus concludes that by creating a grotesque and parodic narrative of normative sexuality, 'Rabbits' formulates an image of the *shōjo* which is able to move her beyond simplistic and polarised representations as either angel or whore which often beleaguer feminist critics in their analyses, and thus, as a text, it is still able to challenge the dichotomisation of discourses surrounding the *shōjo* today.

The seeming dichotomy between materialist readings and post-structuralist readings leads us back to the question of whether, or how far, the purely textual/aesthetic is inevitably disengaged from the political. Put another way, one needs to be wary of even claiming that such a materialist/post-structuralist dichotomy exists, not least because the motivating logic, as it were, of post-structuralism is to disavow the frame or containment implicit in the notion of a (singular) reading. If there are only ever multiple readings, then the conceptual separation of readings one from another (where we might more fruitfully regard their [inter-] relationship as constellatory) becomes impossible to sustain.

Reading 'Rabbits' as a Polaropositionalist Text

Returning to the various contexts within which we might wish to situate Kanai's writings, we can formulate the above question more specifically: how far can we claim that Kanai's deployment of techniques gleaned from the Japanese avant-garde, which she wrote alongside, resist being categorised as

⁹¹ Ibid., p. 71.

mere surrealist *jeux d'esprit* (if they ever were so categorised); and can such techniques be read more productively as being instrumental to a fundamental socio-political engagement with questions of gender and identity? As an exemplar of these techniques, let us turn first to the cultural output of Okamoto Tarō.

Okamoto reached celebrity status in Japan during the 1980s for his numerous TV appearances on variety shows, commercials, and for the catchphrase that encapsulated his philosophy: 'Geijutsu wa bakuhatsu da!' ('Art is an explosion!'). These mainstream media appearances and Okamoto's contribution of *Taiyō no tō* (*Tower of the Sun*) to Expo '70 (an exhibition under the theme of 'The Progress and Harmony of Mankind' which was already widely felt among avant-garde artists to have been symbolic of a selling out of 'radicalism' for a nationalist project that smoothed over Japan's turbulent past) seem to have obscured the subversiveness of Okamoto's intent.⁹² As several critics have recently argued, the contribution of the Tower of the Sun was actually an 'anti-expo' act; Okamoto had wanted to create a 'hideous thing' (*berabō na mono*) to penetrate the big roof of the expo (initially proposed to encase and cover the entire exhibition compound) and destroy its symbolic unifying and harmonising effect.⁹³ This sculpture has also been

⁹² C. Cassegard, 'Japan's Lost Decade and Its Two Recoveries: On Sawaragi Noi, Japanese Neo-Pop and Anti-War Activism', in *Perversion and Modern Japan: Psychoanalysis, Literature, Culture*, ed. Nina Cornyetz and J. Keith Vincent (London: Routledge, 2010) pp. 38-59, p. 46.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 51. This rejuvenated interest perhaps stems not only from the commemoration of Okamoto's 100th birthday in March 2011, which prompted a special edition dedicated to Okamoto in *Bijutsu Techō*, but also from renowned avant-garde artist Sawaragi Noi's book, Sawaragi Noi, *Kuroi taiyō to akai kani - Okamoto Tarō no Nihon* [*Black Suns and Red Crabs: Okamoto Tarō 's Japan*] (Tokyo: Chūō Kōronsha, 2003), which Cassegard examines in detail in his article.

recontextualised within the importance of his contribution to postwar avant-garde surrealist movement discussions on the future of art through his theory of polaropositionalism (*taikyokushugi*).⁹⁴

Since his time in Paris in the 1930s, where he met artists and thinkers including Breton, George Bataille, and Kurt Seligmann, Okamoto had been intrigued by the increasing polarity developing in the arts. He understood this polarity as a rupture and distancing between the supposedly 'rational' art form, cubism, and 'irrational' art form, surrealism.⁹⁵ The notion that cubism and surrealism were polarised and polarising became accepted among intellectual circles from the mid-1930s onwards. That it did so, can be partly attributed to the work of the American art historian and the first ever director of the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York, Alfred H Barr Jr. In order to publicise the exhibition of 'Cubism and Abstract Art' at the gallery in 1936, Barr created a flow chart (which came to be known as 'Barr's Chart'). The chart indicated whether various art movements and forms, from the late nineteenth century onwards, such as neo-impressionism, futurism, dadism, or Japanese prints, fed into the category of 'non-geometrical abstract art' (arts which depict organic shapes), or 'geometrical abstract art' (those in which lines and colours are themselves the focus of the work), or both.⁹⁶ As many contemporary

⁹⁴ Cassegard, 'Japan's Lost Decade and Its Two Recoveries: On Sawaragi Noi, Japanese Neo-Pop and Anti-War Activism', It was resituated in this context by Sawaragi, whose stance Cassegard notes.

⁹⁵ Otani, S., 'Okamoto Tarō no "taikyokushugi" no seiritu o megutte' ['On the Formation of Okamoto Tarō's Polaropositionalism'] 18-36. Otani argues that Okamoto's polaropositionalism, whilst constituting a unique and increasingly crystallised vision of the author throughout his career, contained ideas shared among other thinkers both in Europe and Japan from the 1930s onwards.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 24-26.

artists were concerned either with surrealism, which was decisively placed in the former category, or with cubism, which was most representative of the latter category, the chart became more commonly known as an illustration of their respective genealogies.

Barr's depiction of the genealogies of surrealism and cubism gradually polarising appealed to many members of the avant-garde at the time, as it echoed their own sentiments, including Okamoto's, who brought a copy of the chart back with him after the Second World War for exhibition and discussion in Japan.⁹⁷ In his 1948 publication, *Gabunshū avangyarudo* (*Avant-garde Pictures and Letters*), Okamoto writes that the conceptual polarisation of these two arts was a positive development.⁹⁸ He describes how the synthesis of paradoxes during the late 1920s and 1930s in Japan had led to a nihilism that emphasised the lack of meaning, or power, of art and language, and constituted a weakening of surrealist philosophy.⁹⁹ For Okamoto, this weakening of surrealist philosophy in Japan had in turn seen some surrealists succumb to patriotism, or to a rhetoric which rendered the realities of war abstract or

⁹⁷ Ibid., p. 24. Otani explains that Barr's chart appeared first in an avant-garde magazine in Japan in 1936, translated by Terada Takeo, and was discussed by others at the time as an important paradigm. It reappeared with Okamoto after the war in both his 1948 publication *Gabunshū avangyarudo*, and in various exhibitions designed to discuss the importance of art immediately after the war.

⁹⁸ Okamoto Tarō, *Gabunshū avangyarudo* (Japan: Getsuyō shoten, 1948) pp.123-24. This book is so rare that it has now become a collector's item and I was only able to view a copy of it by visiting the National Diet Library in Tokyo. The closer textual analysis that I make in this chapter are from excerpts which Otani cites in the original Japanese and from Nariai Hajime, 'Taikyokushugi: Mujun toiu hikisakareta kizuguchi' 'Polaropositionalism: The Paradox of the Torn Wound', *Bijutsu techō*, 63 (2011), 56-57. Both articles discuss how Okamoto was focused on the positive aspects of polarisation in the arts.

⁹⁹ Nariai, 'Taikyokushugi: Mujun toiu hikisakareta kizuguchi' p. 57.

unreal.¹⁰⁰ Instead, in his theory of polaropositionalism, Okamoto proposed that maintaining tensions between two unresolvable and paradoxical positions was essential to developing a healthy post-war avant-garde culture.

Although an important voice among post-war art critics, Okamoto was not the only member of the avant-garde to have been profoundly dissatisfied with the ability of Japanese surrealism to sustain a critique of the war. In 1970, artist and critic Tsuruoka Yoshihisa criticised the 'weak' nihilism of the pre-war work of surrealist Kitasono Katsue (among others), who had, in Tsuruoka's view, rendered art and language devoid of the power to resist or protest.¹⁰¹ Kitasono had proclaimed that his 'paradoxical' surrealist symbol of the 1930s, 'The Vacuum Tube' denoted the 'essence of art' which was 'nothing at all'.¹⁰² As Miryam Sas writes, Kitasono's use of the vacuum, a sign which drew on both scientific notions of 'absence', and a Buddhist aesthetic of *mu* (the void), and his 'double negative' signification of the vacuum (*'nanimono mo nai'* 'the nothing working in nothingness'), has been considered a 'dangerous moment for the stability of social understanding and the construction of individual or personal identity'.¹⁰³ This is because it is an attempt to negate the importance of art to 'reality', and to deny its own potential and the potential of individual lives to achieve lasting meaning, or, to imply that the greatest achievement in life lay in transcendence of 'reality' through death. That surrealism in this time offered

¹⁰⁰ Ibid. p. 56-57. Also see: Okamoto, *Gabunshū avangyarudo*, pp. 123-24.

¹⁰¹ Miryam Sas, *Fault Lines: Cultural Memory and Japanese Surrealism* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1999) p. 53.

¹⁰² Ibid., p. 68.

¹⁰³ Ibid., pp. 68-71.

an ideology which evinced apathy to political life can be read as a significant comment on Japanese surrealists' wartime relationship to authority. It indeed suggests, as Okamoto intimates, that surrealism was used as a means to escape reality, rather than contest or critique it.

Although Okamoto initially formulated his theory of polaropositionalism during the 1930s, it was not until the end of the Second World War that he was able to openly propound it in Japan.¹⁰⁴ In so doing, he sought to expose hidden, contentious, even irreconcilable grievances in history. By bringing grievances to the fore through art and language, Okamoto wished to create a 'loud and discordant sound' (*fukyōwaon*) which, in contrast to Kitasono's peace and nothingness, could be used as a weapon against political complacency.¹⁰⁵ Okamoto therefore presents the very reverse non-ideology-ideology to that of Kitasono. As he writes in his 1948 publication *Avant-garde Pictures and Letters*:

[...] we should not compromise either [polarity] in contrast we should, in our despair, deepen the abyss of paradox, and progress in the midst of its tensions. Today, our restless souls should not use the rational or the irrational to deflect one with the other in finding spiritual transcendence. Nor should we fuse those two to create a lukewarm cocktail. As if with the tension of loud suction and repulsion, our spiritual way is the fierce light of the fireworks that fire from the interval of the poles, like the torn mouth of a wound, it is the extremes of raw horror. ¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁴ Otani, 'Okamoto Tarō no "taikyokushugi" no seiritsu o megutte ', p. 24.

¹⁰⁵ Okamoto, *Gabunshū avangyarudo*, pp. 123-24.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 123-24.

The passage quoted above invites us to think of, and locate, our own existence and temporality within a temporal context so massive that it disrupts – and forever problematises – the implied linearity that, for instance, conventional narrative accounts utilise (and, indeed, depend on) to provide an epistemological framework within which to order and understand human experience. Thus, in contradistinction to Kitasono’s vacuum, which is paradoxical in its double negative, creating a black hole of meaninglessness, Okamoto’s ‘abyss’ is paradoxical in its drawing two polarised concepts together. These ‘polarities’ are at one extreme, the universe’s explosive creation, and at the other, its inevitable collapse. Our fragile, experienced ‘present’ lies in what he terms ‘the fierce light of the fireworks that fire from the interval of poles’.¹⁰⁷ This, then, is the ‘tension’ in the darkness of Okamoto’s abyss; it appears to represent all potential meaning where nothing and everything are simultaneously possible, and it therefore constitutes an implicit critique of Kitasono’s spiralling of ‘the nothing working in nothingness’.¹⁰⁸

But it is moreover here that Okamoto’s polaropositionalism borrows, as it were, the ‘form’ of atomic explosions to create expressions which demonstrate art and language’s potential to enact ‘real’ or threatening action. Through his theory of polaropositionalism and, as discussed below, through his art, Okamoto is able to retrieve a postmodern identity whose very origin relates to Japan’s nuclear holocaust, or rather, which assumes this ‘othered’ experience in postwar Japanese history as its own, as its sign, or even as its

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., pp.124.

¹⁰⁸ Sas, *Fault Lines: Cultural Memory and Japanese Surrealism*, p. 68.

locus. Indeed, as the passage quoted above demonstrates, it connects this origin to the origin of the universe. This act in itself marks a powerful paradox because, as Sas has noted about other avant-garde artists who drew on the A-bomb's status as an 'originary event' in the immediate postwar era, the A-bomb signifies the 'destruction of the present reality' and the 'impossibility of return'.¹⁰⁹ As origin, it is therefore simultaneously the eternal displacement of origin, highlighting the fragility of the moment, a constant reminder of the 'raw horror' of war.

A nuclear bomb, such as those used on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, compacts either uranium 235 or plutonium 239 with an outer casing of TNT. Upon the ignition of the TNT, the uranium or plutonium atoms, which usually repel each other, are forced into extreme proximity until a uranium or plutonium nucleus absorbs a neutron from another uranium or plutonium nucleus. This temporarily swells and excites the atom, before splitting it into several faster moving lighter elements. These elements are absorbed by and split into further atoms, resulting in a rapid chain reaction, which is accompanied by the release of a huge amount of energy.¹¹⁰ Polaropositionalism similarly brings together two concepts, or traits, such as 'rationality' and 'irrationality', which cannot be reconciled, and which are oppositionally placed. In so doing, it affirms the existence, and validity, of both, neither 'deflect[ing] one with the other' thereby negating the importance of one

¹⁰⁹ Miryam Sas, *Experimental Arts in Postwar Japan: Moments of Encounter, Engagement, and Imagined Return* (London: Harvard University Press, 2011) p. 130.

¹¹⁰ The Committee for the Compilation of Materials on Damage Caused by the Atomic Bombs in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, *Hiroshima and Nagasaki: The Physical, Medical, and Social Effects of the Atomic Bombings*. trans. Eisei Ishikawa and David L. Swain (London: Hutchinson, 1981). See pp. 30-34.

extreme, nor ‘fus[ing]’ the two, in a manner which might compromise the integrity of both; creating a ‘lukewarm cocktail’. Instead, it creates an immense and powerful explosion. The ‘loud suction and repulsion’ of which Okamoto writes again appears to allude to this trope. In an atomic explosion, there is first ‘repulsion’ as the blast winds spread outwards faster than the speed of sound. However, when the initially high air pressure near the hypocentre of the nuclear blast drops low, there is a counter action of high suction winds, which blow backwards, compounding the damage.¹¹¹ By likening the ‘spiritual way’ forward for Japan in this immediate postwar document to ‘the torn mouth of a wound’, Okamoto clearly sets out his intention to use such artistic expressions to counteract the burying of traumatic experiences and a return to a rhetoric of ‘peace’ in the post-war decades.

Yoake (Daybreak), a painting which Okamoto completed shortly after writing the above in *Avant-garde Pictures and Letters* in 1948, further demonstrates his borrowing of the form of atomic explosions in order to create a subversive postmodern identity.¹¹² The title itself appears to be a reference to the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, during which the bright flash and fireball that momentarily hung on the horizon, was so enormous, it displaced the morning sun. The painting recalls polaroppositionalism by repeatedly presenting us with two extremes, or poles, which are simultaneously brought to the fore.

¹¹¹ Ibid., See pp. 37-39.

¹¹² Okamoto Tarō, ‘Yoake’ (Tokyo: The Tokyo National Museum of Modern Art, 1948).

Fig. 1 *Yoake (Daybreak)* by Okamoto Tarō



For instance, the painting contrasts the organic curves of a surrealist landscape, with the defined lines and primary colour contrasts for which, for instance, the art works of cubist painter Piet Mondrian are renowned. It also contrasts darkness and light, suggesting a fragment of time in which night and day exist simultaneously. The collision of shade and tone is depicted as an explosion of sharp shards, in a range of hues. Some of these shards fit together to form various flat primitivist shapes and are evocative of images of man and woman, and bird and beast. Primitivism mimics the art works of ancient cultures, evoking the theme of 'origin'. Many surrealists, including Okamoto, employed primitivism as a means of asserting a pre-civilised, illogical, non-modern origin, or self, as a means of challenging the modern prioritisation of the supposedly rational facets of humankind (such as the conscious realm,

rational discourse, and social, moral and legal codes).¹¹³ For Okamoto, primitivism was also a means of locating an historic Japanese origin that was alternative, not only to Japan's recent origins as a modern militarised nation state, but also to the mythical origins that this state had aestheticised for the purposes of war propaganda.¹¹⁴ However, as the primitivist shapes in *Daybreak* double as fragments of splintering light and darkness and illustrate the obliteration of both night and day, here, the 'origin' that the primitivist shapes evoke is incontestably postmodern; fractured, non-linear, and momentary.

Okamoto's art, and his 1948 discussion of the polarity of the arts in *Avant-garde Pictures and Letters* has many parallels with Derrida's 1966 lecture 'Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences'. In this lecture, as was noted in the introduction to this thesis, Derrida discusses the increasing polarity of the human sciences between those 'humanistic'

¹¹³ In the surrealist manifesto, Breton (who was a trained psychologist) states that he had become familiar with Freudian theories of the subconscious through his psychiatric studies and his time working with victims of shell-shock in a neurological ward in Nantes during The Great War. Breton chooses to understand his patients' responses to his application of Freudian techniques as evidence of the unconscious mind, and yet, as valid reactions to the arbitrary horrors, and futility of war that they had experienced. He proposes surrealism as a means of exploring the realm of the unconscious and of dreams through practices such as automatic writing and embracing 'insanity' (or insane-like/idiosyncratic behaviour). This was a departure from Freud, who considered the conscious realm, rational discourse, and social, moral and legal codes to be primary in describing the individual in relation to the state. (For instance, in *The Interpretation of Dreams* he commences by outlining how he sought to rationalise dreams: 'In the following pages I shall demonstrate that there is a psychological technique which makes it possible to interpret dreams, and that on the application of this technique every dream will reveal itself as a psychological structure, full of significance, and one which may be assigned to a specific place in the psychic activities of the waking state.' Sigmund Freud, 'The Interpretation of Dreams (1900)', in *Great Books of the Western World: The Major Works of Sigmund Freud* (London: Encyclopaedia Britannica, Inc, 1993) pp. 135-398, p. 135.

¹¹⁴ Thomas R. H. Havens, *Radicals and Realists in the Japanese Nonverbal Arts: The Avant-Garde Rejection of Modernism* (Hawai'i: University of Hawai'i Press, 2006) p. 77.

endeavours which search for a single origin, and studies which affirm infinite play. Towards his conclusion Derrida asserts: '[T]hese two interpretations of interpretation – which are absolutely irreconcilable [...] must acknowledge and accentuate their difference and define their irreducibility.'¹¹⁵ It is important to emphasise here that neither Okamoto nor Derrida's subversion of modern narratives constitutes the negation or suppression of those narratives; rather their inclusion is crucial to the discourse of the 'irreconcilability' which they forge. They both acknowledge its presence, Derrida in the form of the humanism which seeks for a single origin, and Okamoto in his decision to contribute (albeit irreverently) to Expo '70, or in the shapes which approximate recognisable genders in his painting *Daybreak*. In doing so, they both knowingly endanger their own theories: the 'modern' always attempts to encompass all within one grand meta-narrative; therefore, a postmodern theory which includes recognition of the modern appears on one level to be similarly attempting to create such a meta-narrative. And yet, both, by acknowledging a state of permanent resistance as the only state worth maintaining, manage to resist any slide into a newly universalised theoretical position. By not succumbing to a dogma of 'peace', but by instead proposing a future which is like 'the torn mouth of a wound' or the 'terrifying form of monstrosity', they proffer its significance to a new generation. It is specifically their recognition of tension, of suspension in time and signification, of an open-endedness of discourse which I wish to denote as political, and as a 'radical postmodern' move to embrace the unknown.

¹¹⁵ Jacques Derrida, 'Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences', in *Writing and Difference* (London: Routledge, 1978) pp. 278-93, p. 293.

Returning to Kanai, we can now see that her criticism of the feminist ideal of equality approximates to Okamoto's challenge to post-war narratives of 'peace' and 'harmony', and his assertions that they merely sought to conceal the horrors of the war. Both writers perceive that any idealisation of a certain 'state' of existence entails a suppression of the reverse, of the horrors and human complexes which lie beneath. In so doing, they not only critique divisive rhetoric, but also the mechanism behind such rhetoric. Thus they both, like Derrida, seek to exacerbate the irreconcilable and irreducible tensions in their fields, and bring such tensions to the fore. By not diametrically countering, but instead exposing contrasting ideas, forms, or interpretations of interpretations, both subvert that which can be described as 'modern' narratives; namely, grand, synthesising explanations which attempt to smooth over conflicting views, and which block out counter narratives.

With this in mind, we might argue that 'Rabbits' borrows, consciously or not, the form of Okamoto's polaropositionalism, and that it sets up paradoxes by being structured much like an atomic bomb, with an external shell or 'outer' narrative by *watashi* encasing that of the 'inner' narrative core of the rabbit girl. The respective external and internal narratives are composed of 'elements' which are polarised to each other, but collide in the conclusions when *watashi* dons the rabbit suit, creating an irreconcilable paradox and resulting in, to coin a phrase, an 'explosion' of meaning which the reader must actively interpret. The two narratives can be seen as representations of different literary forms: the rabbit girl's interior narrative is a parody of modern women's fiction which employs a confessional mode and enables the psychoanalysis of the subject; *watashi's* prologue and epilogue that fits around it can then be configured as a

postmodern critique, marking the edges of modern narrative and providing a gap through which to view them. 'Rabbits' can thus be read as complementing Kanai's early non-fictional commentary on confessional women's fiction, satirising and deconstructing such works through internal and external narratives respectively, and concluding in a spectacular explosion of modern binary gender codes through the fusion of both narratives and the implementation of a 'radical postmodern' identity of '*watashi* in the rabbit suit'.

The rabbit girl's parody of the confessional mode in women's fiction is achieved structurally, through its central placement within the story as a whole, which gives the reader the illusion that her narrative is the defining one, and that she is a conventional protagonist in a conventional first-person narrative account. That the narrative might ostensibly aspire to the condition of a confession is compounded by the fact that the rabbit girl's 'exploration of identity' takes up approximately four times as much space as the frame narrative. And yet, its very centrality belies its adherence to modern confessional literary forms, exposing itself as parody. Derrida describes how the laws of structure dictate that modern narratives revolve around a central organising core but that this organising core is displaced to the outside where it cannot be seen, transformed or 'interdicted' and is therefore able to stabilise meaning and ensure the narrative's originality.¹¹⁶ If we are to assume, as Derrida argues, that in modern narrative, 'the center is not the center', then the

¹¹⁶ Jacques Derrida, 'Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences', p. 279.

rabbit girl's narrative is not the part of the structure that defines the story in its totality, but is shaped by the external narrator.¹¹⁷

To consider the rabbit-girl's false 'centrality' in other terms, Karatani, who uses Derridean theory to explore the importance of phonocentricity in the construction of modern Japanese subjectivity through confessional writing, outlines how 'landscape', a space or scene of figures and objects which has been alienated from the modern self, is a concept crucial to the fabrication of modern 'interiority'.¹¹⁸ Karatani writes:

Rousseau, in his *Confessions*, describes his sense of oneness with nature when he was in the Alps in 1728. Although the Alps at that time were regarded simply as an annoyance and obstruction by Europeans, they began to flock to Switzerland to discover what Rousseau had seen. The Alpinist was a virtual creation of literature. [...] In the very moment when we become capable of perceiving landscape, it appears to us as if it had been there, outside of us, from the start. People begin to reproduce this landscape. [...] [L]andscapes [...] were not 'out there' from the start, but had to be discovered as landscapes from which we had become alienated.¹¹⁹

This process of alienation and rediscovery also forms the fundamental cathexis for the modern confessional self. As Karatani later explains:

Japanese critics have objected to the conflation in the Japanese I-novel of the 'I' who confesses and the subject of confession. According to their view, although the literary work is a form of self-expression on the part of the author, it should create a world which is different and autonomous from that of the author's 'I'; by conflating the author's 'I' and the 'I' of the work, the Japanese I-novel has failed to create a self-sufficient fictional world. [...] [However, their criticism is based on the premise that] there is a 'self' in need of expression whose existence precedes that of expression – in other words that a binary distinction can be made

¹¹⁷ Ibid., p. 279.

¹¹⁸ Karatani, *Origins of Modern Japanese Literature*, See Ch. 1 pp. 11-44.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., p. 29.

between the self that expresses and the content of expression. [...] The same can be said of modern Japanese literary confession. It was the literary form of the confession – confession as a system – that produced the interiority that confessed, the ‘true self’. [...] It is not the existence of hidden secrets that necessitates confession but the compulsion to confess that produces an ‘interior’ which must be hidden.¹²⁰

Landscape, for Karatani, is the screen upon which the writer/main narrator/protagonist projects characters, locations and objects that are constitutive of his/her ‘other/otherness’. Therefore it is also a scene out of which the modern self emerges. In short, it is a realm of symbols against and through which the writer/main narrator/protagonist manages to rediscover his/her interior self. Literary confession is an exploration of that alienated landscape, enabling its reconstitution within the modern self.

Turning to ‘Rabbits’, we see that, as *watashi*’s narrative begins by stating baldly that s/he is a writer, the reader is led at first to think of *watashi* as the conflated writer/main narrator/protagonist of a modern Japanese confessional text. Following on from Karatani, we might then initially configure the rabbit girl (plus her home, the state of her appearance and her family and rabbits) as relating to *watashi*’s landscape, as being, in other words, alienated objects of *watashi*’s imagination. Yet, in this world of *watashi*’s otherness, it is the rabbit-girl who eventually provides us with a confessional narrative, interrogating her own past actions in order to locate her present identity. Thus if we were to read ‘Rabbits’ in its totality as a model of modern confession, we might claim that it transforms ‘confession’ from being a textually self-effacing conduit to some external truth, to being *textually material*. In this respect, its narrative

¹²⁰ Ibid., pp. 76-77.

procedures resemble the Humpty poem, in which the apricot-tobacco metaphor serves to make the word 'word' material. The confessional mode, in 'Rabbits', has been objectified, alienated and rendered an 'other'. As such, the narrative shifts from inscribing an authentic self (*watashi*) to inscribing a symbolic self (Sayuri, the rabbit-girl); and as authenticity is an element arguably crucial to modern confessional forms, it is this shift away from such authenticity that allows us to register the rabbit-girl's narrative's potential to satirise and parody.

The conversation which prompts her confession commences thus:

'... Are you a rabbit? Ahem, I meant: May I address you, Mrs Rabbit?'

'Mm, I certainly look like one, don't I?' the rabbit said cooing happily from her throat. 'But the truth is that I am human. Maybe. Although recently it occurred to me that being either is fine.'¹²¹

The notion, in this exchange, that identity is only reducible to either one of two 'categories' (here configured as being either 'human' or 'rabbit'), followed by the rabbit-girl's concession that, in her own case, the boundaries have become blurred, recalls the discourse of women writers such as Kurahashi, Takahashi and Tsushima (writing around the time of this short story's first appearance) and their re-negotiation of male/female gender categories. As such, the exchange might be considered as being parodic of such round-table conversation and debate. As the rabbit-girl's story unfolds, the construction of her hybrid identity seems to correlate greatly to that of women writers' notions of their own 'hybridised' male and female attributes. As we have seen, the

¹²¹ Kanai, 'Usagi', p. 524.

assumption at work in their discussions and essays is that their role as writers aligns them with a masculine intellectuality; yet they in turn embrace the concepts of female ‘corporeality’ and ‘submissiveness’ as a means to indicate their ‘otherness’ to, and therefore their subversion – through literature – of, this masculine territory. Similarly, the rabbit-girl assumes ‘human’ actions through her role of keeping and slaughtering the rabbits, and yet she subverts this role by embracing, as it were, ‘rabbit-hood’, and this includes adopting the ‘corporeality’ (the appearance, mannerisms and speech tics) and the ‘submissiveness’ (taking up a passive role by offering herself to her father as a present on his birthday, and in the end by blinding herself in the other eye) of the rabbits. If we read it in this way, the rabbit-girl’s story appears to be a straight allegory of late-postwar women’s discourse as exemplified by the three writers whom we have been discussing, and represents woman’s infiltration into and subversion of roles or ‘spaces’ previously reserved for men.

However, the absurd and grotesque aspects of the rabbit-girl’s narrative (her violent and bloody killing of rabbits, her sexual enjoyment of this, her decision to make a full rabbit suit and her anticipation of her seduction of her father which elicits his surprise and sudden death) are graphically related and constitute a critique of woman’s construction of woman. First, it hints at the need for ‘woman’ to alienate herself from ‘women’ as a category, before assuming that category for herself, just as the rabbit-girl populates her landscape with ‘rabbits’ and female students at her school, whom, as we may remember, she describes as *‘baka na roba no yō’* (‘like stupid donkeys’). Secondly, it speaks of the hypocrisy and violence of woman’s (verbal) subjugation of women; of their rendering them ‘carnal’, just as the rabbit-girl

butchers and eats the rabbits. Thirdly, it ridicules the late post-war empowered woman's performance of 'submissiveness' and her attempted seduction/inadvertent emasculation of (a now declining/bed-ridden) masculine/patriarchal power. In other words, her narrative can be read as a satire upon certain representations of 'truth' made by women writers and feminists at the time, exposing the way in which confessional modes of expression in women's discourse that attempt to reconstitute 'what it means to be a woman' are necessarily dependent on, and created by, gendered dichotomies and hierarchies.

Indeed, the internal narrative of 'Rabbits', in recalling the Oedipal myth which has been fundamental to psychoanalysis (forming as it does the basis of Freud's theory on the construction of [male] sexuality and gender), has (as discussed above) prompted a number of critics to postulate that it is a kind of coded representation for the development of late postwar (woman's) gender and sexuality. To briefly recap, for Kitada it relates to Kanai's personal awakening to her own unique sexual identity and, by describing the process of estrangement with one's family and a father's sudden death, relates to Kanai's own biographical story and her decision to 'travel the path alone and write'; for Orbaugh it is a myth which demonstrates how woman's retrieval of their sexual power and their overturning of patriarchal power structures is accompanied by their tragic isolation; for Takeuchi, the rabbit-girl's alternate assumption of active, then passive roles usurps heterosexual patterns for desire and thus makes it a pioneering 'queer text' through which we witness a unique liberation from convention. Yet, despite these differences in their readings, they nonetheless all assume the internal narrative to be representative of

‘confessional’ literature, inasmuch as it allegedly pertains to some psychological ‘truth’, whether relating to social or personal realities, even if on an ‘allegorical’ level.

However, the rabbit-girl’s narrative’s positioning within a postmodern frame, its black and absurd humour and use of irony all act to undermine confessional and psychoanalytical representations of woman by exposing them as grotesquely fictional. As Karatani posits, the postmodern stands outside a modern linear mode of discourse, creating gaps in such narratives, operating through doubt and questioning, and instead exposing the world as one of surfaces or fictions.¹²² In ‘Rabbits’, *watashi*’s ‘exteriority’ can be understood thus, in the way in which his/her narrative encases the internal narrative, forever problematising any attempt the latter makes with an air of doubt which corrodes empirical fact and material reality, implementing a ‘postmodern’ *modus operandi* that forces the reader to an awareness of the textuality of the *shōjo*’s bizarre narrative.

This postmodern textuality is perhaps primarily achieved through *watashi*’s anonymity. As noted in the previous section, the use of the pronoun *watashi*, which is conventional in confessional modern literary forms for a conflated author/main narrator/protagonist, might tempt us to make an association between the ‘real writing body’ (Kanai) and the text. And yet, whereas the internal narrator describes her family and even mentions her school life, the external narrator gives us no such detail, which is to say that to the furthest extent, we are unsure of *watashi*’s age, gender, proper name, marital status, geographical location or race. This anonymity defies the

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convention of modern confessional writing, of which the aim is to anchor the terms of identity, to describe *watashi*, to detail the terms of the 'modern self', to determine status and gender. Instead, these gaps in *watashi's* narrative leave the reader space to enter and question, to doubt *watashi's* connection with our shared reality and to view him/her and his/her world as a textual construct, as nothing more (or less) than a *narrative convention*. Indeed, it is because the external narrative plays so teasingly with the conventions of modern confessional literature, at first seeming to affirm its conventions and then denying them, that it acts like a conduit for the reader to question the links between 'confession' and 'reality', and perceive how all fictional creations, whether they are explicit or not about the details of their characters, are 'textual fabrications': how 'truth' is inescapably woven by, and not represented by, the literary convention of the first person narrative.

However, the frame narrative in 'Rabbits' goes further than asking the reader to identify 'text' as fiction; it asks us to doubt the materiality of our own identities just as we doubt Sayuri's, to see our own identities as similarly constructed, read and reiterative realities. It is an insistence on referencing a so-called 'shared reality' that is the primary strategy deployed by realism, as a literary mode, to give the illusion that what is depicted is true. Realism's second strategy is then to refuse its own status as a text. It is these twin strategies that 'Rabbits' compromises at the outset. For instance, all references to the readership's 'shared' reality are textual: the act of citing Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* in the epigraph has the effect, as do all epigraphs, of leading the reader to concretise their connection with the 'author' through a shared textuality, rather than a shared reality. However, the citation

itself is from the precise moment in *Alice's* narrative where Alice's 'landscape' ceases to be that which would relate to any reader's material reality: it is the point wherein she is 'suddenly' drawn into the world of fantasy, chasing a white rabbit and falling down a hole. This pervasive fictionalising effect is compounded by the statement with which the short story opens that gives the impression that *watashi* is a writer:

The act of writing includes not writing, but above all writing, therefore there is no escape; to write must be my fate.¹²³

This enigmatic sentence, focusing as it does on the act of writing (and not writing), rather than on the status of *watashi* as a writer, is also severed from the rest of the narrative by the proceeding phrase: 'The day I wrote that in my diary [...]'.¹²⁴ As this opening statement stands alone, it seems to acquire a special status, as if it in some way pertains to an eternal truth which lies beyond the fluctuating and contingent truths of the main narrative trajectory; it appears (to quote Karatani) to come from a "transcendental" consciousness that attempts to bracket transcendent consciousness which would organize history [or in this case the rest of the short story] within the unitary perspective of subjectivity'. Further, *watashi's* narrative shift from present tense to past tense, manoeuvres her/him into a position which is future (external) to and observing of his/her every move (as it happens in retrospect), thereby facilitating her/him to narrate his/her story as a whole. However, the narrative extremities of 'Rabbits' – the enigmatic opening line, and *watashi's* final act of remaining still among the rabbits – defy the narrative's attempts to

¹²³ Kanai, 'Usagi', p. 522.

¹²⁴ Ibid., p. 522.

delineate the boundaries of fiction, neither enabling closure. Instead they stare defiantly into eternity and relate to the unknown. To this extent, whereas the rabbit-girl's narrative has been distinguished by her quantifiability, as 'one' life, whose future is abruptly curtailed by her death in *watashi's* narrative, *watashi* on the other hand extends his/her existence into infinity.

To return to our 'nuclear' metaphor, then, *watashi's* narrative provides a thick fictional outer casing for the rabbit-girl's inner narrative and each is composed of elements that operate in polarity to the other, the external narrative having a corrosive effect on the truth claims of the internal narrative. These narratives 'fuse' with each other when the external narrator dons the rabbit suit and 'enters' the internal narrative. This act collapses the internal narrative's perceived centrality, mingling its production of a psychoanalysable, definable and quantifiable female subject with its polar opposite of a metaphorical writing body and an 'ungendered', 'unsocialised' and infinite 'I', producing an uncollapsible paradox. However, whereas 'Rabbits' sharp and contrastive juxtapositions between modern and postmodern narrative produce a polaropositionalist collision of elements reminiscent of the structure of an atomic explosion, in 'Rotting Meat', it is as if the narrative is 'spread around' (mirrored by the spreading of the rotting smell in the narrative) from external to internal narrator and back again in a manner which is perhaps more analogous of the process of 'rotting' itself.

Reading 'Rotting Meat' as a Discourse of Decadence

Rotting, decay and decadence form a syntactical alignment through Japanese avant-garde literary texts, notably Sakaguchi Ango's 'Darakuron' ('Discourse of Decadence'), from the immediate post-war.¹²⁵ Sakaguchi's essay discusses the destruction of Japan's cityscapes on the eve of capitulation, and the subsequent demise of both its nationalist ideological stance and of the wartime identities of Japanese subjects and argues that such devastation and loss, for which he applies the term '*daraku*', is an originary state. In Buddhist terms, *daraku* describes humankind's inevitable forgetting of the teachings of the Buddha and of their descent into 'sin'; but, by stripping it of religious connotations – connotations which would imbue it with a transcendent ideology – Sakaguchi's text conceives *daraku* as that which is 'decadent' 'depraved' or marking a 'degeneration' of status, or, as Sas interprets his use of the term, '[r]otting or dissipation under the guise of an amoral, banal chaos'.¹²⁶ 'Discourse of Decadence' can be read as an antidote to wartime rhetoric and as a text which seems to urge the Japanese to accept a broken reality and broken identities.¹²⁷

Sakaguchi writes:

Can it not be said that the kamikaze hero was no more than an illusion, and that the history of humanity begins when he takes to black-marketeering? That the widow as angelic disciple is no more than an illusion, and that the history of humanity begins

¹²⁵ Sakaguchi Ango, 'Darakuron' ['Discourse on Decadence'] in *Kindai bungei hyōron gyosho* (Tokyo: Nihon tsusho sentā, 1990).

¹²⁶ Sas, *Experimental Arts in Postwar Japan: Moments of Encounter, Engagement, and Imagined Return*, p. 5.

¹²⁷ Sakaguchi, 'Darakuron'. See p. 132.

when she is fulfilled by a new love? And might it also not be said that the emperor is also no more than an illusion and the emperor's true history begins when he becomes an ordinary human being? [...] Japan has lost the war [...] but it is from the womb of decadence's truth that humans are born.¹²⁸

The collapse of the fascist ideology which created and sustained wartime identities results in their shattering, and 'real' human nature as fallen, corruptible or broken, subsequently emerges. As a text, 'Discourse of Decadence' echoes the avant-garde notion which we have been discussing in this chapter that identity is an 'illusion' created and sustained by language in which both state and citizens are complicit. That Sakaguchi's essay went through a revival and became a best-seller in 1967 (the year, incidentally, of Kanai's literary debut) would therefore appear to be a comment on the supposedly democratic post-occupation state which had propounded the ideals of 'freedom', 'suffrage' and 'peace' throughout Japan's reconstruction, but which continued to lend support to US policies of cold and hot wars against communism (in face of overwhelming public opposition).¹²⁹ The overwhelming popularity of 'Discourse of Decadence' at this time is another indicator for the feelings of disenfranchisement experienced by the Japanese people on the discovery that democracy too might be an illusion. Moreover, through its scepticism towards the construction of (state) ideologies and its understanding of the way in which people's identities were sewn up through the process, Sakaguchi's 'Discourse of Decadence', like Okamoto's polaropositionalism, provided the tools to the late-sixties avant-garde

¹²⁸ Ibid., p. 7.

¹²⁹ Sas, *Experimental Arts in Postwar Japan: Moments of Encounter, Engagement, and Imagined Return*. See pp. 4-10.

movement to critique and dismantle modern structures which were restrictive to them and to discover new ways of articulating themselves and their identity.

Firstly, the notion that rotting, dissipation and chaos are not only inevitable, but also affirmative modes of existence, subverts the hierarchical values of the modern. Secondly, by describing the modern process whereby humankind constructs ideologies, builds nations and creates identities as a cyclical and not linear process, 'Discourse of Decadence' challenges the modern's means of signification at once negating the teleological notion of 'progress' implicit in modern linear narratives, and installing a completely alternative pattern upon which meaning is reached. Suddenly, that which the modern considers permanent and stable achievements of human (re)productivity 'Discourse of Decadence' manages to present as illusory and fragile results of 'human weakness', of an inability to not construct social orders which sanitise and cover over the cracks of violence and trauma. Whereas the modern symbolic order aligns destruction, dissipation and decay with death, or rather 'anti-life', in 'Discourse of Decadence' they are the chaotic origins of humanity; they are its 'womb' to which it continually returns. 'Discourse of Decadence' thus echoes polaropositionalism's avocation of irreconcilable tension as a means of radical postmodern resistance. And again, similarly to Okamoto's polaropositionalism, Sakaguchi does not attempt to pinpoint a definitive origin, but conceives of origin as a reverberation through history, as peoples, movements and civilisations fall.

Finally, because it strips the notion of ideology from that which is determined as 'human', Sakaguchi's essay has been aligned with the carnal literature movement, a movement which, as discussed above, conceives the

body as an origin of identity, through the expression of which discourse grounded in abstract humanist assumptions can be subverted. However, the concept of *daraku*, insofar as it encompasses the eventual disintegration of the body through rotting, and insofar as it is a term which can be applied to buildings, cities, and the ethos which holds a nation together, strips the notion of 'human' to an even deeper and more radical level than that which 'the body' denotes. It does not reify the body as a locus or origin of that which is determined as human as the body is equally susceptible to degradation, decay and disintegration: it is rather that it is the *process* of disintegration and reconstruction which relates to humans, animals, and inanimate and ideological structures. This process of fragmentation, or active fracturing and dissipation inherent to the notion of *daraku* is one which we have already come across in Kanai's prize-winning debut poem, wherein Humpty Dumpty, an egg which is always already known to be 'falling' and fragmented affirms a performative understanding of identity, wherein the 'act' rather than the 'actor' is signified, and this enables new postmodern 'subjectivities' a greater scope for expression. This interpretation of *daraku* is undoubtedly at work in 'Rotting Meat': the story utilises it to corrupt narratives that construct gendered identities and collapse the divisions between subject/object, human/animal, animate/inanimate and life/death through the trope of 'rotting meat'.

In 'Rotting Meat', we are presented with four characters: *boku*, an ageing prostitute, the estate agent/pimp and the butcher, who, similarly to the Kamikaze-pilot-turned-black-marketeer, the widow and the emperor of 'Discourse of Decadence', might be taken to represent familiar types of their age. The first three of these four in particular are always already embodiments

of *daraku shita* (or fallen, decadent) identities, a point signalled not only by their syntactic alignment with ageing, death and non-(re)productivity, but by the varying states of societal disillusionment and cynicism they represent. The progression of their years appears to offer but one promise: that they will degenerate further and further towards their inevitable fate of becoming a lump of rotting meat. In contrast, the butcher, the only character amongst these four who sets himself against death through his profession (as the one who kills and isn't killed), and whose desire to marry the prostitute marks his obedience to modern convention, meets a shockingly sudden and grizzly end.

The woman appears to be the origin of the spread of decadence, inhabiting the site of the smell of rotting meat, and located (much like the rabbit-girl in 'Rabbits') at the conceptual centre of the story, inside the closet, inside the apartment. That the external narrator *boku* uncovers her by tracing the path of 'an unsettling, seemingly nauseating stench' (*fukai na hakike no suru yō na ishū*) which emanates from a physically internal (this time, the estate agent's) *kōshū* (bad breath) and a physically external *ishū* (stench) within the apartment, renders her (again, similarly to the rabbit-girl in 'Rabbits') as a symbolic/parodic manifestation of interiority, accessed through a layer of postmodern exteriority (lent this time by the anonymity of the external narrator *boku*, and the anonymity/ghostliness of her apartment which *boku* is unable to locate at the end of the short-story).¹³⁰

She begins her narrative by listing the luxurious presents which were left in her apartment by the men who visited her and paints a picture of healthy

¹³⁰ Kanai, 'Funiku', pp. 518-19.

abundance; 'Pretty lace underwear, precious stones, chocolate, silk, perfume, face powder, butter, coffee; I had everything'.¹³¹ She also comments that some men left certain items which she keeps for them, 'gold watches, jewel incrustated cuff-links, lighters', and that by looking at these objects she can remember everything about the man they belonged to, how she loved them and how they loved her.¹³² Some men leave her money. However, in such cases, to avoid it becoming a crass transaction of service for financial remuneration, the money is tucked under the lamp stand next to her pillow for her to 'find' when they have gone. Both Orbaugh and Knighton note that the woman's narrative fulfils a feminist agenda by inverting gender hierarchies, or reversing the chain of signification, so that for instance, she, the prostitute, is the consumer, not the consumed, and both the butcher and the male narrator are reduced by her to lumps of 'rotting meat'.¹³³ Yet her system forms a totally alternative pattern to the linear trajectories of the modern wherein 'men/humans' consume 'women/animals/objects'. Rather, as her customers 'leave' presents which she then consumes, it implements a cyclical pattern like that at work in *daraku*, so that she, the consumed, consumes that which they leave so that she can sustain herself and offer her body for consumption again.

¹³¹ Ibid., p. 516.

¹³² Ibid., p. 516.

¹³³ Orbaugh, 'The Body in Contemporary Japanese Women's Fiction, 138: 'The butcher who killed the pig and consumes the prostitute ends up replacing the corpse of the pig and becoming meat himself'); and Knighton, 'Writing the body – as meat: Kanai Mieko's 'Rotting Meat' as Surreal fable' (p. 175, 'the external narrative [becomes] enclosed – or more accurately, *consumed* – by the interior narrative of the prostitute').

That the woman's pattern of consumption offers an alternative system of signification to the modern similar to that of *daraku* is further confirmed when she concludes her description of her system of services and compensation as '*Sore de, kurashi o tatete ita n desu mono*'.¹³⁴ Here '*kurashi*' (lifestyle) is written in *furigana* (Japanese phonetic syllabary) alongside the characters '生計' ('*seikei*' livelihood) and therefore can be translated as both 'This is how I spent my life/earned a livelihood' simultaneously.¹³⁵ Because of the very nature of her profession we are made keenly aware that her 'livelihood/life' relates to her body as a resource, and therefore to live by earning in this way is also to be conceptually equivalent to being 'spent' or 'consumed' physically, and appears to hold an understanding of 'being' in a performative sense, as a cyclical process of fragmentation, reconstitution and re-fragmentation, of simultaneous 'unbeing' or *daraku*. Finally, as 'being' here relates to a physical process, it can be applied equally to all organic matter and is indiscriminate of gender and categories of human/animal/the inanimate. Although the female body may be perceived as the origin of this subversive identity owing to the central placement of her narrative within the overall short story, and the significance of her body to her 'being', her body is not its limit. This becomes apparent when the 'vulgar hairy butcher with a good physique' (*gehin de taikaku no ii kemukujara no tosatsunin*) appears on the scene, and lays challenge to her system.¹³⁶ He is oblivious to the woman's more subtle regenerative cycle with its multiple sources of sustenance and corrosion,

¹³⁴ Kanai, 'Rotting Meat', pp. 516.

¹³⁵ Ibid., pp. 516.

¹³⁶ Ibid., p. 517.

wherein he too enters the process of being consumed even as he lives. His livelihood and lifestyle absolutely depend on a brutal hierarchical order and strict linear trajectories of need and desire wherein he kills animals for his subsistence and consumes women for his enjoyment. He monopolises her physically with such vigorous sex that she is too tired to see other customers afterwards and has to turn them away at the door and take a rest. In this physical monopolisation, in his emotional jealousy towards other clients and in his proposal of marriage to her, it is clear that he has no qualms about harnessing her energies for himself exclusively. His impractical and insensitive gift of an un-skinned piglet, rather than providing a means of subsistence to the woman, suggests, as the woman herself notes, that he is rather obviously reasserting his hierarchy wherein the 'meat' of both animal and woman are his object of consumption. Its resemblance to a corpse rather than a piece of butchered meat allows it to occupy a liminal space between animate and inanimate which, as the woman herself explains, makes her uncomfortable by being too closely metaphorical for her line of work. As she explains,

In this world, there are corpses and bodies for which it is more apposite to call them meat; in particular, calling a prostitute's body 'meat' is common, but however you looked at it, the thing that the butcher brought round was the skinned body of a piglet which he had killed. So I simply wrapped the body of the piglet up in a plastic bag and newspaper and stuffed it under the bed.¹³⁷

The piglet thus at first provides the reader with a foil for the woman as it hangs in this liminal space as the reader is kept in suspense as to whether it, and not the woman as we first were led to believe, will transpire to be the locus of the

¹³⁷ Ibid., p. 517.

terrible smell. Yet, in fact, it is upon this gift that the cycle of the woman's system of signification and consumption pivots and seals the butcher's fate as she must now somehow consume the meat for her survival, and in doing so, must imagine the butcher as his gift.

That it is the butcher who turns out to be the piece of rotting meat, not the woman, nor the piglet, is thus designed to subvert narrative expectation not just because it reverses, exaggerates and renders 'physical' the gendered roles of man and woman as Orbaugh suggests, but moreover because it shatters the illusion constructed by the binary and linear modern system of signification with which the butcher enshrouds himself and reaffirms the woman's version of reality in which all living matter is in a continuous process of decay and fragmentation. Unfortunately, the butcher only 'realises' the truth of the originary state of *daraku* subsequent to his death, through the decaying of his body.

Boku, on the other hand, is the would-be aspiring middle-class masculine subject whose original desire to acquire his own 'ie' (household) and spend his time productively 'writing' has somehow been compromised and this has led him down a path of searching for an apartment where he can pursue a life of non-productivity in 'running to the very extremes of not-writing' and instead 'waiting for death'.¹³⁸ That death comes in the guise of a young woman, 'a thousand times more beautiful' than he indicates that *boku* has not only already embraced a subversive identity of 'unbeing', but that he greatly idealises this state and that his narrative also confirms the female body as an

¹³⁸ Ibid., p. 518.

originary site for 'rotting meat'/'death'/the process of '*daraku*'.¹³⁹ That at the end of his story, the same 'rotting meat'/'death'/'*daraku*' has manifested itself in his breath like the estate agent's suggests that subversive masculine 'interiority' correlates to the subversive 'female body'. However, just as the piglet is the foil for the woman in this short story, the estate agent is the foil for *boku*. Whereas the estate agent/pimp's subversion of the modern and alignment with deterioration and decay is through his parasitic function, feeding off the respective situations of *boku* and the woman for his own financial gain, *boku* reverses this trope by wanting to be eaten. His encounter with the woman has not resulted in a selfish exploitative cynicism, but a vibrancy and warmth and in an urgent love of life/death. The characters and outcomes of this short story thus correlate not only to 'Discourse on Decadence', but also to polaropositionalism, as they represent the constant tension between two poles, the modern and the postmodern, male and female, writing and not writing, life and death, love and cynicism. These poles cannot be reduced to each other and yet they continually threaten to erase the presence of the other.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Kanai's rejection of psychologising critical approaches in her 1970 essay and her linking it to confessional modes of writing in producing 'woman' as a pre-gendered 'commodity' is extremely radical in that psychoanalysis, as a metanarrative, can in many ways be considered a

¹³⁹ Ibid., p. 518.

'postmodern' tool as it attempts to deconstruct representations of subjectivity. Returning to our two epigraphs, in her efforts to reconstitute women's subjectivity into positive and non-'phallogocentric' (modern binary) terms, Luce Irigaray produced her own psychoanalytic terms in fabricating the notion of woman as an 'alterity' to man. Irigaray argues that rather than conceiving of 'woman' as a symmetrical otherness which is necessarily elided to that of a negative 'other' of 'man', women writers should make a concerted effort to form a metanarrative of woman which interweaves and rewrites ancient myths, creates the notion of a female god, and is therefore able to stand as a cosmic and infinite entity which is never completely definable, and not reliant on being defined in opposition to man. To this extent, Irigaray's attempt to reconstitute 'woman' in positive alternative terms, and through different value systems, seems to have much in common with Kanai's early work. Further, by insisting on a plurality and infinity of meaning, constituting woman as the polar opposite of man which has been suppressed in modern discourse, parallels can also be drawn between polaropositionalism and Irigarayan theory. Seen in this light, the creation, in Kanai's fiction, of a new 'gender' that is plural and infinite, can be considered as extremely close to that of Irigaray's *écriture féminine*.

The main difference between Kanai and Irigaray is that the former does not allow us definitively to assign this gender or identity as 'woman', thereby affirming existing modern binary gendered terms. In this way, her writing on gender and identity most closely aligns with that of Judith Butler, as both attempt to eliminate gender difference by fragmenting linear discussions of gender and sexuality. Butler, in order to move as far away as possible from an 'essentialist' conception of gender and identity, resurrects and refines the

theory of 'performativity', in which subjectivity is achieved through one's acts (or performances), including speech acts.¹⁴⁰ For Butler, these performances 'foreclose' meaning around the self within the given space and time that they are enacted (for example Humpty's sitting on the wall is a demonstration of his completed subjectivity).¹⁴¹ But between these performances are 'gaps' wherein the subject's 'subjectivity' is suspended (when Humpty falls from the wall), and there is a potential for them to change the manner in which they (re)signify themselves. Although in Kanai's poem we are left in suspense as to whether Humpty is put back together again, his being reconstituted differently by an unknown plural readership or through re-reading is implied.

In Butler's reading, as in Kanai's early poetry, psychoanalysis is denied the linear narratives requisite to formulating a comprehensive explanation of gender and sexuality; instead, the reader of behaviour/text is instead forced to focus on interpreting individual performances, allowing 'subjects' to move more fluidly between genders and sexualities, eluding the categories of 'woman' and 'man', or 'heterosexual' and 'homosexual'. This is also clearly evident in Kanai's short fiction works which move fluidly from narrative to narrative, so that her characters never achieve qualities of 'interiority' or recognisable selfhood with a stable gender, name and realistic geographical origin/place of residence which would allow them the three-dimensionality that the term 'character' evokes. Instead they remind us of Karatani's description of the postmodern as manifestations of 'exteriority', as

¹⁴⁰ Butler, 'Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity'. For Butler's position on performativity in contrast to Beauvoir, Irigaray and Lacan see: pp. 18-46 .

¹⁴¹ Ibid., Ch 2, 'Prohibition, Psychoanalysis, and Production of the Heterosexual Matrix', pp. 85-90.

interchangeable surfaces and fictions which stand outside a modern linear mode of discourse, and as narratives which create gaps in the metanarratives of the modern through their provisionality which creates doubt and questioning.¹⁴²

As they work through their respective paradoxes, both short stories reject the streamlined definition of the terms which affirm a 'modern' narrative of 'all women' writing against a global patriarchal order on which Orbaugh's argument hinges. And while they arguably rescue 'female' desire from its enclosure within a fixed modern semantic, yet the liberation of the terms of gender mean that they cannot be considered as a 'semantic victory' for women as Knighton concludes, for the simple reason that if the purpose of these texts is to find meaning beyond that achieved through binary definition then its 'victory' belongs to neither sex, but to both or rather to all sexes and sexualities. As Kanai never rebrands the plurality of genders that her works form as 'feminine', they seem more parallel in discourse with Butler's performativity than they do with Irigaray's alterity, emphasising the fragmentation and corrosion of coherent gendered categories rather than aiming at their resurrection. As such both texts implement the creation of a complex debate about the reality of postmodern gender and sexuality and their continuing permutations and evolutions, which is inclusive, or parodying, of absurd and grotesque modern histories, but not continuing, as Takeuchi has suggested, their silence or oppression. With regards to gender discourse, they underscore that the language used by 'women' about themselves is fundamental to the

¹⁴² Karatani, 'One Spirit, Two Nineteenth Centuries', p. 260.

production of (women's) identity, and therefore constitutes a crucial starting point for revolution and change, both on an individual level and beyond. Both 'Rabbits' and 'Rotting Meat' are texts which will no doubt require our repeated re-interpretation as they call us to re-evaluate our very means of systematic categorisation and challenge the way in which we define gender and sexuality.

Chapter Two

Matrices of Meaning in *Love Life*

Introduction

The previous chapter explored how Kanai's early short stories 'Rabbits' and 'Rotting Meat' can both be read as appropriations of avant-garde techniques that emerged in the immediate aftermath of the Second World War; and how such appropriations serve to deconstruct and parody established genders and sexualities, revealing them to be fragmentary and fictional. It argued that in so doing, both texts can be seen to complement Kanai's non-fiction critique of those narrative constructions of woman that were being forged by feminists and other contemporary female writers during her early career. Taken together, then, both 'Rabbits' and 'Rotting Meat' constitute important contributions to, and interventions in, not only contemporary debates surrounding gender and sexuality, but also the Japanese avant-garde's attempts to challenge the sociocultural status quo of the time. By inscribing models of postmodern subjectivities born of plurality and contradiction, each story is able to defy the restrictive social conventions and normative categorisations and codifications of female subjectivity, without recourse to a straightforward, seemingly unproblematic discourse of antagonism (such antagonism, of course, being fundamentally reliant on the very terms and categories it opposes).

This chapter furthers this exploration of the subversive potential of Kanai's writings, by analysing Kanai's debut novella *Ai no seikatsu* (*Love Life*,

1968).¹ *Love Life* describes a day in the life of its Tokyoite protagonist, Ai; and its catalogue of incidents – if not its narrative strategies – can be quickly summarised. The novella commences with Ai's waking up in the apartment where she lives with her husband F at ten o'clock in the morning. F has already gone to work, but Ai's narrative describes the scene as he had left it, noting the used crockery in the sink and the record on the record player. After drinking coffee, reading the paper and tidying up, Ai decides to go into town. Upon arriving in Shinjuku she goes to a coffee shop where she attempts to contact F by making a phone call to the university where he lectures, but is shocked to learn that he has taken absence without leave. She then recalls various meetings with her acquaintance, the painter, including the time that she spoke impulsively to him in his atelier. She also reads a letter from her friend who has recently been transferred to Kyoto. Ai then visits a popular Shinjuku Jazz Café, *Mokuba*, where she attempts, but fails, to write a response to her friend's letter. There, she encounters a male university student who turns out to be one of F's students. She is, by now, really hungry; so she goes into a restaurant and orders food. However, when a man sits at her table and starts to eat his spaghetti bolognese, she finds she is suddenly unable to eat. In the restaurant she experiences a very traumatic memory of being surrounded by pickled anatomical body parts in her aunt's hospital. She leaves the restaurant and finds another public telephone to call F's friend to see if he has seen him that day. The friend's wife answers the phone and informs her that F is there and that he has been there all day. Ai is at first angry. She has imagined the worst

¹ Mieko Kanai, *Ai no seikatsu* [*Love Life*] in *Kanai Mieko: Zentanpenshū* (Tokyo: Nihon bungeisha, 1992) pp. 7-51.

(that F has met with a terrible accident), and she is angry that she had been living with this hypothesis all day and it has turned out to be false. However, her anger quickly disappears when an arguing couple, who are walking just a few paces behind her, are killed by a speeding car as they cross the road seconds after Ai herself has crossed. Ai sees that the book that the girl was carrying is discarded next to a bucket of rubbish. She picks it up, gives it to the policeman on the scene and runs in the opposite direction with tears in her eyes.

With the choice of name for her protagonist, Kanai immediately directs the reader towards an understanding of identity necessarily reliant upon a proliferation of different meanings, connotations and ontologies. Such an understanding is accomplished by the simple, but effective, means of the pun: as Ai means 'love' in Japanese and plays not only on the English first person 'I', but its homophone, the 'eye', her name suggests an active viewing subject, that also necessarily evokes the concept of love. As if to further confirm this interpretation of her name, the narrative employs a stream-of-consciousness style and relates the events and emotions Ai experiences (including that of being in love) as if they are being transcribed in the present moment. Ai is thus perpetually inscribed in the triple acts of being, loving and seeing.

The novella's exploration of identity as a site reliant upon a multiplicity of meanings, connotations and ontologies is also suggested by its title: *Ai no seikatsu* can be translated into English as *Ai's Life*, *The Life of Ai*, *The Life of Love*, and *Love Life*, each translation foregrounding a different set of nuances present in the Japanese title. While the titles *Ai's Life* and *The Life of Ai* emphasise the fact that the novella is an account of a day in the life of a woman called Ai, the

latter title here, by divorcing the name Ai from the possessive 's', enables the anglophone reader to more easily appreciate the pun which Ai makes with 'I' and 'eye', highlighting her inscription as an active, viewing subject. Alternatively, the title *The Life of Love*, read in retrospect of the narrative (in which, as was noted above, Ai struggles through various encounters, traumatic memories and physiological experiences, and encounters a tragic accident), can be taken as a comment on the novella's challenge to conventional notions of love. Finally, by making use of idiomatic English, the title *Love Life*, which I have opted for here, slightly shifts or stretches the meaning of the Japanese title: *Ai no seikatsu* literally translates as 'the *daily*, or *day-to-day* life of love', and is not a phrase used to denote a given person's romantic relationships, or 'love life'. However, this title draws attention to the manner in which the protagonist's 'love life', namely her relationship with her missing husband F, is fundamental to her narrative. It therefore successfully alludes to both the novella's challenge to conventional definitions of love, and to Ai's active inscription of her identity, thus allowing a range of interpretations comparable to the Japanese title *Ai no seikatsu*.

To facilitate such a range of interpretations, Kanai deploys the textual strategy of using what we might term a *constellatory* fictive technique that constructs twin matrices of literary meaning; through setting in play alongside each other a set of associated tropes, figures and references, the text invites us to generate meanings through the very process of making such associations. We shall have more to say about this textual strategy below (and, much more extensively, in Chapter Three). For the moment, however, let us begin by noting how, throughout the novella, these twin matrices resonate and alternate with

each other, as they seek to inscribe not only Ai's material reality, but also her imaginary, fictional relationship with her husband F. The first matrix, *Ai-body-presence*, derives from the narrative inscription of Ai's abjected physiological origin, which assails her when she attempts to eat, recalling images of parasites, corpses and the dismembered maternal body. The second, *F-narrative-absence*, is discernible in Ai's attempts to describe (or, rather, *inscribe*) her husband, F, and her relationship with him, attempts which seek to render his physical *absence* from her narrative account as a textual *presence*.

The Dazai Osamu Prize Committee

Before we discuss the text itself, we should note one of the more interesting literary-critical contexts in which *Love Life* was situated after its publication: the 1967 Dazai Osamu Prize.² That the novella was radical in its experimentation, particularly in its challenge to conventional fictional representations of subjectivity, is readily apparent from the comments made by the judges on the panel. The panel was, typically for its time, comprised of six men; and might be considered, figuratively, to be a rounding up of the usual suspects. All of them were in their sixties, with the exception of Nakamura Mitsuo (who was a mere fifty six). Four of them had graduated from either Tokyo or Kyoto University and had subsequently pursued careers as literary critics, writers and university professors. Collectively, the judges resort to two

² Founded in 1964 by the publishing company, Chikuma shobō, the Dazai Osamu Prize is an annual literary award for an unpublished short story by a previously unrecognised writer. Scott J. Miller, *Historical Dictionary of Modern Japanese Literature and Theatre* (Scarecrow Press: 2009) p. 19. For the selection committee's comments see: *Kanai Mieko: Zentanpenshū*. Vol. 1 (Tokyo: Nihonbungeisha, 1992) pp. 601-605.

strategies in order to be able to *account* for the novella: one is to criticise it for its deviation from some kind of aesthetic, novelistic norm (and to lament the failure to be the novella they think Kanai *should* have written); the other is to discern a *biographical* explanation for its narrative procedure; that is to say, to point out either the fact that Kanai was nineteen at the time of *Love Life's* publication, or the fact that she suffered from the lack of a university education, or the fact that she was a woman. These two strategies then come together in a single charge: the charge of *aesthetic immaturity*. For instance, Karaki Junzō, contrasting *Love Life* with the actual prizewinner, Isshiki Jirō's *Seigenki* (*Visions in Azure*), writes:³

The talent of the work just trickles out without control. If the writer had been unable to write, placed a brake on her talent, allowing it to pool and stagnate, it would gain weight. But I suppose this is an impossible request for a nineteen year old.⁴

Kawakami Tetsutarō similarly remarks upon Kanai's age, and also upon on her lifestyle, which he perceives as being directly relevant to the *worth* of *Love Life*:

Receiving honorable mention, Kanai Mieko's *Love Life* is a work which strikes one with the distinctiveness of a writer who is a nineteen year-old half-woman living the lifestyle of a student; in short the weakness of the work is that the freshness that we should highly regard of the discoveries of this adolescent woman

³ Isshiki Jirō, *Seigenki* [*Visions in Azure*] (Tokyo: Chikuma shobō, 1967). *Visions in Azure* describes a war veteran's experiences of returning to his hometown after thirty years have elapsed, and reviving his memories of his mother, who died young. The novel is set on the island where the writer grew up, Okinoerabujima, which is situated in Kagoshima Prefecture, between the island of Kyūshū and Okinawa's main island. Isshiki had been writing since the mid-1930s and was fifty-one when he won the prize.

⁴ Karaki Junzō, in *Kanai Mieko: Zentanpenshū*. Vol. 1, p. 604.

who stands for the first time at the gate of life is, at the same time, a handicap.⁵

Usui Yoshimi feels strongly that Kanai lacks the education required to be a writer and remarks:

[...] for a work of a nineteen-year-old adolescent, it is, relatively speaking, markedly developed, and even interesting. However, I assume this is because the writer has read interesting bits and pieces of foreign literature in translation, and this has given birth to some sensitive responses and reflections. If you wish to become a writer, first, pass the entrance exam of the university of your dreams. Then try writing a novel in five or ten years' time.⁶

Nakamura goes even further in his criticism of Kanai and her novella and declares:

Miss Kanai Mieko's '*Love Life*' is a work of a nineteen-year-old adolescent woman but, although it shows literary talent, I cannot think that it is any more than a simple piece of composition. After stuffing her head full of literary images, she relied on her wit and just attempted to write something akin to a novel; its moments of narcissistic innocence arise from her lack of life experience and are physiological in basis, in the same way as you might say that her cheeks are rosy and her skin is pretty.⁷

One can hardly blame judges of a literary prize for making comments that might otherwise seem excessively adjudicatory in tone; that, of course, is their *raison d'être*. Instead, we might observe that one of the inevitable consequences of any literary prize being awarded (or withheld) is that the

⁵ Kawakami Tetsutarō in *Kanai Mieko: Zentanpenshū*. Vol. 1, p. 604.

⁶ Usui Yoshimi in *Kanai Mieko: Zentanpenshū*, Vol. 1, p. 604.

⁷ Nakamura Mitsuo in *Kanai Mieko: Zentanpenshū*. Vol. 1, p. 605.

adjudicating panel is necessarily drawn towards utterances that rest on the assumption that *criticism* and *evaluation* are somehow coterminous. Having said that, we might also forgive today's readers' gasping in comical horror (or, indeed, righteous indignation) at the starkness of the assumptions informing these assessments: this ill-educated, rosy-cheeked, prettily-skinned 'half-woman', her talent 'trickl[ing] out without control', like blood from a woman who has forgotten to apply her sanitary towel, has produced a text of 'narcissistic innocence' which is clearly 'physiological in basis'. My last sentence, of course, rather unfairly homogenises the four into a single critical voice. Even so, it is abundantly clear that, collectively, they make the same explicit assumptions: Kanai's youth, sex and education (or lack thereof) are obvious impediments to her being able to produce the sort of text she ought to have done.

The remaining two critics on the panel, Ibuse Masuji and Ishikawa Jun, are slightly more nuanced in their readings.⁸ In contrast to those of the Tokyo

⁸ Both Ibuse and Ishikawa had won significant literary prizes for their work at the end of the 1930s: Ishikawa had won the Akutagawa Prize for *Fugen* (Tokyo: Hanganō, 1936), translated as *The Bodhisattva, or, Samantabhadra: A Novel*. by William Jefferson Tyler (New York Columbia University Press, 1990); Ibuse had won the Naoki Prize for *Jon Manjirō Hyōryūki* (Tokyo: Kawade shobō 1937), translated as *John Manjiro, the Castaway, His Life and Adventures*, trans. Hisakazu Kaneko (Tokyo: Hokuseido Press 1941). Just prior to Kanai's debut, Ibuse had received the prestigious Noma Literary Prize the year before, for his seminal work *Kuroi ame* [*Black Rain*] based on the experiences of the victims of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima; while Ishikawa had just published *Shifuku sennen* [*The Millenian*] which would achieve huge popularity among young adults and be considered by many as a masterpiece. *Kuroi ame* was first serialised in the literary magazine *Shinchō* between January and September 1965, before being published as: Ibuse Masuji, *Kuroi ame* (Tokyo: Shinchōsha, 1966), trans. John Bester (Tokyo: Kōdansha International, 1969). Ishikawa's *Shifuku sennen* (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 1967) has not yet been translated; however, it is reviewed and discussed in English in Susan Napier, *The Fantastic in Modern Japanese Literature: The Subversion of Modernity* (London: Routledge, 1996), pp. 141-178). For a lengthier discussion of Ishikawa and Ibuse's careers, see: Donald Keene, *Dawn to the West:*

and Kyoto university professors, the two writers' respective critiques of Kanai's text are guided far less by conservatism and elitism. However, *Love Life* seems to have challenged even their expectations of literature. Ibuse writes:

When I read the beginning [of *Love Life*], I had the feeling that it wasn't going to work. It was like the bewilderment I have felt in standing in front of a modernist painting. I have a memory of my heart racing. It was a feeling akin to that. However, little by little, as I continued to read on, it started to make sense. I can see that it is written from a point of view which is almost completely opposite to that adopted by *Visions in Azure's* writer. I came to the meeting with the intention that if the selection committee had gone cold on *Visions in Azure*, I would cast my vote for *Love Life*.⁹

However, that *Love Life* came runner-up in the prize was largely because of the influence of Ishikawa, who commences his commentary by stating generally that, although there were so many applicants, this is not to say that the world of literature is flourishing; 'rather, it is close to decline' (*dochira ka to ieba, bunkosuitai ni chikai*).¹⁰ He remarks that this time the competition was very close, but if he had to choose his favourite out of the four finalists' works, he would select Kanai's and writes:

Even though a flash of talent can be seen in *Love Life*, the world of this novel dies before it has taken solid shape. We leave reality, but before even gaining entrance into the world of fiction, everything becomes fuzzy. To borrow from the words used in the text itself, it does not result in *dépaysment*. And worst of all, the writer's feelings rise up and are exposed. In a novel, feelings are

Japanese Literature of the Modern Era, A History of Japanese Literature (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998) pp. 946-49 and pp. 1087-1102 respectively.

⁹ Ibuse Masuji in *Kanai Mieko: Zentanpenshū* Vol. 1, p. 603.

¹⁰ Ishikawa Jun in *Kanai Mieko: Zentanpenshū*. Vol. 1, p. 603.

completely useless. [...] It is vulgar for powerful elements to rise prominently to the fore, but the fuzziness at its core is troubling.¹¹

Ishikawa concludes by postulating that as the writer is still young, there is room for her to find herself as a writer, and therefore resolve the '*fuwafuwa*' ('fuzzy') areas of her writing.¹²

Ignoring for a moment the fact that, rather than the text, it is Kanai's lack of worldly experience, her lack of higher education, her 'student lifestyle', or finally, her 'physiology' as a 'nineteen-year-old adolescent woman' that are the object of critique in the Tokyo and Kyoto University professors' comments, the elements of the text that appear to have elicited their disapproval are linked to its incipient challenge to both conventional modes of literature and the conventional inscriptions of selfhood. As we saw in the previous chapter, modern literature came into being (according to Karatani) through the splitting of the self from landscape (and the realm of symbols which constitute it), and through the discovery of confession as a system via which the writer/narrator/protagonist, represented by a literary mode that mimics the spoken word and thus produces an 'internal voice', is able to explore that landscape, and rediscover his true self, or 'interiority'. The aim of such literature is to produce a selfhood that appears, through a rationalisation of emotional struggles, or an unravelling of a private history, to have depth of character. In so doing, it creates a narrative which is linear, chronological, or systematic, in showing how elements from the past shape the present character

¹¹ Ibid., p. 603.

¹² Ibid., p. 603.

of the narrator. The text which was awarded the Dazai Osamu Prize that year, *Visions in Azure*, an autobiographically inspired account of a war veteran's return to his hometown (a landscape that had been alienated from him through the passage of time, which he rediscovers by recounting and resolving private memories of his childhood and mother), might thus be taken to be archetypal of this literary mode; thus, also, the critics' overwhelming endorsement of *Visions in Azure* is also further revelatory of their conventional literary preferences. However, *Love Life*, as Ibuse remarks, is written, 'from a point of view which is almost completely opposite to that adopted by *Visions in Azure's* writer'. In other words, *Love Life* produces a narrative which not only does not conform to such conventional modes, but which calls their relevance to the new cultural identities of Kanai's generation into question. It manages this by replacing any 'coherent' internal voice with a stream-of-consciousness narrative technique, so that the textual sections that pertain to Ai's decisions, recollections, observations, and descriptions do not form a chronological, linear narrative, as would a conventional 'internal voice'.

Virginia Woolf, in a famous modernist statement of aesthetic intent, argued forcefully the case for stream-of-consciousness as a narrative mode, even as she pointed out the tiredness of the naturalistic conventions she sought to challenge, interrogate and displace:

The writer [of naturalist fiction] seems constrained, not by his own free will but by some powerful and unscrupulous tyrant who has him in thrall, to provide a plot, to provide comedy, tragedy, love interest, and an air of probability embalming the whole [...]. But sometimes, more and more often as time goes by, we suspect a momentary doubt, a spasm of rebellion, as the pages fill

themselves in the customary way. Is life like this? Must novels be like this?

Look within and life, it seems, is very far from being “like this”. Examine for a moment an ordinary mind on an ordinary day. The mind receives a myriad impressions – trivial, fantastic, evanescent, or engraved with the sharpness of steel. From all sides they come, an incessant shower of innumerable atoms; and as they fall, as they shape themselves into the life of Monday or Tuesday, the accent falls differently from of old [...]. Life is not a series of gig lamps symmetrically arranged; life is a luminous halo, a semi-transparent envelope surrounding us from the beginning of consciousness to the end. Is it not the task of the novelist to convey this varying, this unknown and uncircumscribed spirit, whatever aberration or complexity it may display, with as little mixture of the alien and external as possible? We are not pleading merely for courage and sincerity; we are suggesting that the proper stuff of fiction is a little other than custom would have us believe it.¹³

The radical potential of such a narrative challenge is evident, in the above passage, in Woolf’s governing metaphors of tyranny and rebellion (and one wonders how much the comments from the Dazai Osamu panel members were designed precisely to quell such incipient rebelliousness they each may have discerned in Kanai’s novella); the ‘myriad impressions’ made on ‘an ordinary mind on an ordinary day’ do not naturally order themselves into coherent, linear narrative forms. If one’s experience of life is thus fundamentally *impressionistic*, then it follows that *a priori* methods of shaping such impressions (plot, causality, incident) are, inevitably, as *retrospective* as they are *falsifying*. Such shaping necessarily entails a *re-writing* of one’s experience according to pre-determined narrative patterns, which forever inscribe such

¹³ Virginia Woolf, 'Modern Fiction (1919)', in *Twentieth Century Literary Criticism*, ed. David Lodge (London: Longman, 1972) pp. 88-89.

experience as *already having happened*. Thus, already having happened, that experience can be objectified, analysed and recounted – in a word, materialised – by the narrator, to form a readily understandable ‘series of gig lamps’, which proceed in a temporally unproblematic manner. Thus, one of the major aspects of Woolf’s challenge to naturalistic fiction lies in this interrogation of the naturalists’ adherence to the *historic* model: her image of sensory impressions as constituting ‘innumerable atoms [...] that shape themselves into the life of Monday or Tuesday’ shows how her conception of modern fiction’s task to convey in prose the impressionistic nature of human experience necessarily entails the rejection of linearity, in favour of a narrative technique predicated upon *sensory immediacy*.

The applicability of Woolf’s comments to *Love Life* is clear, as the latter presents the reader with a kaleidoscopic array of textual and narrative fragments, all the while eschewing the straitjacket of a linear chronology, as it abandons any notion of narrative causality: Ai’s narrative switches without warning from the present tense to the past; it includes her attempts to remember in note form; her rushed, rather garbled, and abandoned written response to the friend in Kyoto; and snatches of her conversations with people, both those that take place in her past, and those that take place in her present moment. Ai writes:

[...] From the canteen window the rail tracks in the station yard can be seen, and the painter comments that, viewed from a height, the tracks have the vivid reality of another dimension to them, as if a child has drawn the tracks in black and white with slate pencils. I listened to the painter’s words while enduring a pain, like a tension, that crept up the right side of my back. Suddenly the pain came upon me.

The pain is suddenly upon me. As I finish reading the letter, the right side of my back is throbbing. I close my eyes for a minute, while listening to the melody of the tango that the coffee shop is playing (it's the *Tango of Roses*) and hold my breath. [...]

– It's so painful. I wake alone in the middle of the night and hold a pen; I'm so scared sometimes that I even wake up F. I hate it. I hate it. I'm afraid. My life, every day, the room, the desk, everything, is completely unrelated to me. There's nothing to be done, that's how it is. I feel like I'm going mad. I feel sick.

I turned to the painter and spoke impulsively.

I tried to fight the words, washed clean by my sincerity as soon as they came out of my mouth.¹⁴

Here, Ai starts by describing her (past) visit to an Ikebukuro department store canteen with the painter. She remembers feeling a pain in her back at the time, and immediately describes feeling the same pain in her present situation in the coffee shop in Shinjuku. She then recalls another past experience in which she was in pain in the middle of the night. In the latter narrative section, Ai recalls in present tense, the past emotional state that is either triggered by pain, or that causes her the pain. Here she relates being scared; hating and feeling alienated from her daily life; feeling powerless; worrying about going insane, and so on, without attempting to form a linear, rational, explanatory narrative about this emotional state. Ai's narrative then recounts another past episode in which she had spoken impulsively to the painter while she was visiting his atelier, thus linking it to the traumatic episode in which her emotions are brought to the fore. However, this time, Ai comments on how she

¹⁴ Kanai, *Ai no seikatsu*, pp. 23-24.

spoke, and how she felt about the words that she said, without ever describing what she said.

Nakamura's comment that *Love Life* is 'something akin to a novel' (*shōsetsu rashī mono*), although perhaps meant to be pejorative, is thus accurate in that, by its taking the form of a personal diary or log, the text draws on the confessional conventions of the Japanese I-Novel, even as it departs from them through its emulation of erratic thought patterns which do not follow a linear chronology. Ai's thoughts, as the excerpt above demonstrates, go back and forth between past memories, anxieties for the future, and Ai's engrossment in her own present physical and sensory experiences. This again underscores the text's postmodernism, in its parody of and play with the modern literary form and departure from conventional linear narrative. The speed of the narrative flow, which skips from one incident to the next, means, as the panel judge Karaki pointed out, that it does not achieve a more 'weighty' text depicting internal struggles (including 'writer's block') that creates a sense of interiority important to modern confessional literary forms.¹⁵ Instead, the kaleidoscopic rotation of events reinforces the impression of a selfhood which does not have time to edit, or rationalise, and which links image, to sensation, to a set of emotions, to a reflection on those emotions, through various associations and shifts of tense.

Furthermore, Ai does not inscribe herself as alienated from her landscape and its surrounding culture; on the contrary, through her narrative she is intricately integrated into it. Her stream-of-consciousness narrative is a

¹⁵ Karaki, in *Kanai Mieko: Zentanpenshū*. Vol. 1, p. 604.

transcription not only of her decisions, recollections, observations, and descriptions, but also of the various *texts* which she encounters, and that might, conventionally, be considered as 'external'. These include, for instance, the lyrics to the song that Ai overhears in the shopping arcade, the postcard invitation she receives to a John Cage concert, or her friend's letter from Kyoto. The inclusion of these 'external' texts, each with different styles and formats, some of which, like the Miyako Harumi song, or the 'foreign literature' to which Usui referred in his panel assessment, are extratextual, gives the sense that Ai's narrative (or, as we saw Nakamura prefer, Kanai's own 'head') is 'stuffed' with 'literary images'.¹⁶ By inscribing a contemporary selfhood which is necessarily inextricable from the surrounding culture (the culture of 1960s Tokyo no longer being restricted to output of solely Japanese origin), Ai's stream-of-consciousness narrative defies conventional modern conceptions of the duality between self and landscape, or, indeed, between 'Japanese' and 'Western', or other 'foreign' cultures. Furthermore, its stream-of-consciousness technique, seeking as it does to inscribe the erratic patterns of thought, undermines the realist mode of the conventional 'internal voice' of confessional literature, and exposes how the latter is organised through dichotomies, linearities and chronologies which are themselves constructions.

As we have seen, Kanai's short fiction works of the early 1970s, such as 'Rabbits' and 'Rotting Meat', feature anonymous, framing narrators who inhabit a recognisable, if sketchily-defined world, together with internal narrators whose worlds, by contrast, are bizarre and fantastical; the challenge they throw

¹⁶ Nakamura, in *Kanai Mieko: Zentanpenshū*. Vol. 1, p. 605.

down to any expectation of an unproblematic realist mode of narration is thus unmistakable. In *Love Life*, however, the novella presents us with a single subjective perspective, which aims at replicating conscious experience, relaying thoughts and events as they occur, including the written texts that Ai reads, as they are written. Indeed, we might argue that it is precisely because of the protagonist's stream-of-consciousness narrative method, taken together with the multitude of contemporary references to popular culture, counter-culture and surrealism (not to mention her 'half-woman', student-like lifestyle), that the panel judge Ishikawa was so easily able to read *Love Life* as though Ai is nothing but a literary representation – and a poorly-executed literary representation, at that – of the writing body Kanai. For Ishikawa, *Love Life* comprises nothing more than a straightforward regurgitation onto the page of the author's own thought processes; hence his severe rebuke that 'the writer's feelings float up and are exposed'. His pronouncement that '[i]n a novel, feelings are completely useless' shows that he felt that the novel was (and problematically so) a representation of Kanai's emotional and psychological reality.¹⁷ Challenging Ishikawa's conflation – or, more to the point – *confusion* of 'author' with 'narrator', and having recovered Ai as a fictional construct of the text, we can nonetheless concede that is possible, in the first instance, to read *Love Life* as if it were a representationalist account of Ai's thought processes. Certainly, its stream-of-consciousness technique doesn't *necessarily* militate against a representationalist aesthetic. After all, to return to the passage from 'Modern Fiction' quoted above, Woolf's central point about the true nature of lived experience is that it is fundamentally failed or betrayed by

¹⁷ Kanai, *Kanai Mieko: Zentanpenshū* Vol. 1. p. 603.

conventional narrative methods: '[l]ife is not a series of gig lamps symmetrically arranged; life is a luminous halo, a semi-transparent envelope surrounding us from the beginning of consciousness to the end.' Rejection of the characteristic attributes of (what we can now term) *so-called* representationalist fiction is not, for Woolf, a correlated rejection of an aesthetic presumption in favour of prose fiction that seeks to be true to life. Rather, she suggests 'that the proper stuff of fiction is a little other than custom would have us believe it.'

And yet, at the same time, through the deployment of the missing husband F, a metafictional device (discussed below) that propels the plot of the novella, Ai's narrative breaks the illusion of realism and draws attention to itself as a text, while posing questions about the relationship between reality and fiction. Thus *Love Life's* combination of metafiction and psychological realism also seems to have perturbed Ishikawa who takes issue with what he terms the 'fuzziness' of Kanai's text, by the way in which the narrative 'leave[s] reality' but does not quite 'gain entrance into the world of fiction'.¹⁸

Ai-Body-Presence

For Ishikawa, then, 'fuzziness' is effectively synonymous with 'aesthetic failure'. Reclaiming such 'fuzziness', however, it is my contention that the novella's production of these two distinct literary *modes* is moreover a result of the novella's aim to locate, describe and resolve two distinct modes of *being*. The first of these is an elusive material reality that greatly resembles Julia Kristeva's

¹⁸ Ishikawa in *Kanai Mieko: Zentanpenshū*. Vol. 1, p. 603.

'abject'. In contrast to her contemporaries, Luce Irigaray and Hélène Cixous, Kristeva does not challenge the Freudian and Lacanian concept of a finite dualism of self and other at work in modern psychoanalysis.¹⁹ Instead, she challenges this dualism's positioning at the origin of the self, by reformulating both Freud's theory of 'primal repression' and Lacan's thesis of 'the real', in a manner which posits the maternal body (or 'chora', as Kristeva reterms it) as a pre-cultural zone that precedes and produces the ego.²⁰ As she writes,

Let us enter, for a moment, into that Freudian aporia called primal repression. Curious primacy, where what is repressed cannot really be held down, and where what represses always already borrows its strength and authority from what is

¹⁹ Cixous, Irigaray and Kristeva all develop post-structuralist theories which argue that the 'othering' of women and their bodies is interwoven into the very fabric of modern language and cultural convention. For Cixous and Irigaray, this 'othering' is evident in modern philosophies, such as Freudian psychoanalysis, in which the (only) template for the modern 'self' (or 'ego') is white, heterosexual, and masculine; or alternatively, in Lacanian theory, which, in its post-structuralist 'return to Freud', seeks to further delineate a finite dualism of subject/object at work in modern psychoanalysis, thereby continuing Freud's sole (masculine) template for normality. In order to reclaim positive, yet different, identities for women, Cixous advocates that women challenge male-led theories by writing about the female body, while Irigaray, whose theories on the other were considered in Chapter One, and are returned to in greater detail later in this chapter, creates a transcendent concept of the 'feminine' which stands outside of the modern framework. In so doing, both thus argue there are alternative models for the self (and its relationship with the other) than those that Freud and Lacan outline. However, Kristeva challenges Freudian and Lacanian theory by returning to them and reformulating them, exploiting loopholes in both psychoanalytic models for traces of the maternal body and its pre-symbolic language (which she terms 'the semiotic'). This chapter focuses on her discussion of the way in which the maternal body represents an excluded or 'abjected' mode of being in, Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*. trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982). For Cixous and Irigaray's challenge to finite, masculine theoretical models see, for instance: Hélène Cixous, 'The Laugh of the Medusa', trans. Keith Cohen and Paula Cohen, *Signs*, 1 (1976), 875-93; and Luce Irigaray, 'When Our Lips Speak Together', in *This Sex Which Is Not One*. trans. Catherine Porter and Carolyn Burke (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1977) and Luce Irigaray, 'The Fecundity of the Caress', in *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*. trans. Carolyn Burke and Gillian Gill (London: Continuum, 2004).

²⁰ Kristeva refers to the chora as 'the receptacle of narcissism', in other words, a space, or state of being in which the individual learns to differentiate itself from the other. Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, p. 14.

apparently very secondary: language. Let us therefore not speak of primacy but of the instability of the symbolic function in its most significant aspect—the prohibition placed on the maternal body (as a defense against autoeroticism and incest taboo). Here, drives hold sway and constitute a strange space that I shall name, after Plato (*Timeus*, 48-53), a *chora*, a receptacle.²¹

In this passage, Kristeva deconstructs Freud's theory of 'primal repression' by pointing out its contradictions: namely Freud's assertion, on the one hand, that language is the restraining force, controlling, or rather, *prohibiting* access to the maternal body; and on the other, his acknowledgement that what is repressed inevitably returns, and therefore that language is unable to fully implement such a prohibition. In so doing, she places the maternal body not only as an *a priori* to culture, but most importantly as a space, or state, which is not irrevocably cut off from the individual after they have entered the symbolic order, but which repeatedly intrudes into the consciousness, and thereby disrupts the symbolic order's dualisms.²² Kristeva further develops her theory

²¹ Ibid., pp. 13-14.

²² In Freud's *Studies on Hysteria*, he describes his first attempts to get the patient to recall pathogenic memories without the use of hypnosis, and notes how comparatively difficult they are to access from a state of consciousness. This discovery leads him to the theory that there is an initial phase of repression (or 'primal repression') that occurs at a stage in an infant's development, prior to their acquisition of language, during which the child learns to link the forces of instincts with anxiety, and excludes them from consciousness, creating, or initiating the unconscious mind. See Sigmund Freud, 'The Case of Miss Lucia R (1895)', Selected Papers on Hysteria', trans. A. A. Brill, in *Great Books of the Western World: The Major Works of Sigmund Freud* (London: Encyclopaedia Britannica, Inc, 1993) pp. 31-37; and Sigmund Freud, 'Repression (1915)', trans. Cecil M. Baines, in *Great Books of the Western World: The* (London: Encyclopaedia Britannica, Inc, 1993) pp. 422-27.

In Lacanian theory, 'the real' is a state of nature wherein pure need and satiation are realised and there is no separation between subject and object. Although animals experience this primordial state throughout their lives (for example, when they are on heat, or, as predators when they catch, kill and eat), Lacan contends that the closest humans experience to 'the real' is as infants prior to six months old, at a point in

of the importance of the chora to the development of the ego by reformulating Lacan's outline of an infant's psychological development. She writes that there is a stage, which she terms 'the abject', that bridges the final few months of the child's immersion in the chora, and the first few months of the development of 'narcissism' (which corresponds to Lacan's 'mirror stage').²³ During the stage of 'the abject', the boundaries of self and other, human and animal are established, but not in a clean and complete manner. Instead, there may be moments when the child returns to the security of the chora. Yet, returning to

psychic development wherein there is no distinguishing between 'the self' and 'the mother'. Lacan terms the next stage in development, between approximately six and eighteen months, 'the mirror stage', as it is at this time that the child constructs an 'ideal ego' based on their perception of themselves as a 'whole' and 'separate' entity in the mirror. As language is a system of differentiation, the mirror stage, although it marks the child's entry into the 'imaginary order', is crucial for the child's eventual mastery of language, and therefore their entry into the 'symbolic order' from eighteen months onwards. For Lacan, the psychic and physical borderlessness that constitutes 'the real' can never be articulated through language precisely because our entry into the 'symbolic order' irrevocably seals it off from us, and this is what makes (our understanding of and re-accessing) it, 'the impossible'. Nevertheless, as it constitutes a material reality, 'the real' erupts into our imaginary and symbolic orders around traumatic events (such as the death of a close friend or relative) forcing us to acknowledge the finite materiality of our existence. Its intrusion into our consciousness threatens, or fractures, the narratives and fantasies that we use to cover it up on a daily basis. Lacan thus posits 'the real' as a psychic zone that is unknown and unknowable to modern subjectivity, and this leaves it open to interpretation. Lacan discusses the concept of 'the real' in Jacques Lacan, 'Tuché and Automaton', in *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1977). For a more detailed description of 'the real' as a precondition of the mirror stage see: Elizabeth A Grosz, *Jacques Lacan: A Feminist Introduction* (New York: Routledge, 1990) pp. 32-35. Lacan outlines the developmental transitions during the mirror stage in: Jacques Lacan, 'The Mirror Stage as Formative of the I Function', in *Écrits: The First Complete Edition in English* (London: W. W. Norton and Company, 2006) pp. 75-81. For a concise summary of the differences between the symbolic, the imaginary and the real see: Slavoj Žižek, *How to Read Lacan* (London: Granta Publications, 2006). Various feminist commentators, such as Elizabeth Grosz, have chosen to represent, and thereby emphasise the elision between 'the other' and 'the mother' in psychoanalytic discourse pertaining to 'the real' by referring to it as 'self and (m)other'. See Grosz, *Jacques Lacan: A Feminist Introduction*, p. 32. For Kristeva's description of the chora as a receptacle of narcissism see: Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, pp. 13-15.

²³ Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, pp. 13-15.

this state becomes increasingly traumatic and suffocating, as the infant must relinquish their developing sense of independence.²⁴ As Kristeva writes:

The abject confronts us, on the other hand, and this time within our personal archeology, with our earliest attempts to release the hold of *maternal* entity even before existing outside of her, thanks to the autonomy of language. It is a violent, clumsy breaking away, with the constant risk of falling back under the sway of a power as securing as it is stifling.

The connection with the mother's body must, therefore, through the child's entry into the symbolic order, be violently repressed, must become 'abject'.²⁵

Moreover, in order to conceive the self as an 'ideal', 'whole', 'separate', 'clean' and crucially 'human' entity, it is not only the mother's body which is radically and violently excluded, or 'abjected', from the infant's identity, but also excrement, filth and, more broadly, the world of animals or animalism.²⁶ But the limits of this abject territory do not stop there. As humans, we create a distinction between that which remains in our social order, and that which we expel. Thus, through our socialisation, what constitutes 'the abject' comes to encompass all that has been expelled from modern culture, even that which had

²⁴ Ibid., p. 13.

²⁵ See 'Approaching Abjection' in Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, pp. 1-32.

²⁶ See 'From Filth to Defilement' in Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, pp. 56-89 for Kristeva's explanation of what societies abject.

'Animalism', or the worship of animals, is thought to be one of earliest forms of religion, and, as Kristeva explains, one which primitive societies turned away from in order exorcise the threat (of sex and murder) that it posed. (See Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, pp. 12-13.)

once been its subject, such as corpses, criminals or the insane.²⁷ We repress our material association with 'the abject' from our imagination and our culture, which is to say we 'paper over' our encounters with it using narrative from the imaginary and symbolic orders.²⁸ Our encounters with the abject thus become what we cannot fully remember or confront and manifest themselves in our private phobias and traumas; they surprise us and fill us with horror. An instance which serves to illustrate the repression of the abject on a cultural level is, as we saw in Chapter One, the Japanese government's attempts to establish a narrative in which Japan and its citizens were the leaders and instigators of peace, harmony, and world unity through high-profile events, such as Expo '70, thereby smoothing over their role in the Second World War, and obscuring its attendant atrocities and horrors. In so doing, as avant-garde artists such as Okamoto and Sakaguchi pointed out in their writings, they were actually returning to a rhetoric which they had deployed throughout the war. The Japanese avant-garde movement's attempts to dismantle this narrative, and, as this chapter sets out, to align themselves with 'abject identities', can thus be read as a rejection of the government's attempts to wilfully forget the evils committed during war. Indeed, read alongside Kristeva's theory of the abject, the avant-garde's crisis of identity can be understood as an effort to confront, and profoundly accept, that which is most violently extricated from social identity, and, as is the case with *Love Life*, denote that abject identity as 'love'.

²⁷ Ibid., pp. 1-32.

²⁸ Ibid., pp. 12-13.

How, then, might the theory of the abject affect (or effect, or infect) *Love Life*? The first task Ai undertakes for the day, as the novella commences, is to attempt to remember what she has eaten over the previous week and on which day, and it is through this task that the narrator's aims in writing her diary emerge. As Ai writes:

A new day has started.

Although, where yesterday finished I already can't clearly remember. I can't even properly recall what kind of day it was yesterday. I look at the clock next to my pillow and it's ten o'clock. What was it that I had for dinner last night? For dinner last night I had deep-fried oysters, apple and lettuce salad, and miso soup with tofu.

The day before yesterday was pork chops, potato salad, and miso soup with spring onion and deep-fried tofu. Lunch yesterday was a croissant with a glass of milk, and the day before it was the same. Anyway, when I woke up at ten o'clock yesterday, I finally succeeded in remembering what was for dinner and lunch in detail, stretching back a week.

But today I can only recall it fragmentarily.²⁹

Ai's inability to remember things, and in particular, to recall what she has eaten over the past week, are thus a source of anxiety. She writes that yesterday she called up her husband F to resolve the matter, making a note of meals eaten. Today, she looks at the note to prompt her memory, but realising that the note and her memory contradict each other, and reasoning with herself that the note is based on yesterday's memory, she concludes that she has no way of knowing which is correct, memory or the note. In other words, neither 'consciousness' nor 'text' are able to access or accurately represent a material

²⁹ Kanai, *Ai no seikatsu*, pp. 7-8.

reality. However, rather than this being a general comment on the limits of history and the unreliability of memory (we are later made to understand), it is because the material reality pertains specifically to her act of eating and that eating is a traumatic physical event, the memory of which Ai continually suppresses. As Ai herself explains:

I am always in terror of my incessant hunger. I always have an empty stomach, and cannot stop thinking I want to eat. And yet, when I eat even one or two mouthfuls of food, my empty stomach makes me so anxious that my hunger vanishes without trace. Just looking at food, my throat heaves with nausea.³⁰

In the original passage Ai writes '*taemanai kūfukukan ga, itsumo watashi o obiyakashite imasu*', translated above as: 'I am always in terror of my incessant hunger'.³¹ However, the term *obiyakashite imasu*, unlike the word terror, also means being taken suddenly unaware and therefore its use suggests that Ai's hunger is a force that assaults her suddenly, regardless of her intent, and fills her with fear. In this sense, we can see clearly how Ai's hunger functions much like Kristeva's 'abject'. Indeed, Kristeva describes '[f]ood loathing' as 'perhaps the most elementary and most archaic form of abjection'.³² She explains:

When food appears as a polluting object, it does so as oral object only to the extent that orality signifies a boundary of the self's clean and proper body. Food becomes abject only if it is a border between two distinct entities or territories. A boundary between nature and culture, between the human and the non-human. [...] In other respects, food is the oral object (the abject) that sets up

³⁰ Ibid., p. 34.

³¹ Ibid., p. 34.

³² Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, p. 2

archaic relationships between the human being and the other, its mother, who wields a power that is as vital as it is fierce.³³

For Ai, eating prompts the appearance of a horrific material reality which resembles Kristeva's 'abject'. First hunger 'draws' Ai to the physical act of eating which she subsequently cannot remember or record accurately, just as the abject 'draws [one] toward the place where meaning collapses'.³⁴ And in the middle of this act, after one or two mouthfuls, whereupon the boundaries between Ai and the abject entity (the food) are collapsed, her hunger turns quickly to fear and anxiety, in the same way that, for Kristeva, reunion with the mother's body creates a sudden fear of being suffocated.

The most protracted appearance of 'abject' imagery occurs when Ai visits a restaurant in downtown Tokyo.³⁵ Having ventured into Shinjuku that morning, Ai becomes so hungry that she goes to a place to eat. The restaurant is crowded, but brightly decorated in cream and green. The waitresses are dressed in 'sky-blue semi-flared skirts' (*sorairo no semi fureā no sukāto*) that create a breeze as the waitresses swish around the tables.³⁶ Ai sits down at a small table for two and quickly orders a small bottle of beer, Hungarian style beef stew, bread and coffee. She lights a cigarette and waits for her food to arrive, taking a detailed note of what the two men and two women seated at the next table are eating (the men order stewed chicken livers, salad and rice, and

³³ Ibid., pp. 75-76

³⁴ Ibid., p. 2.

³⁵ Kanai, *Ai no seikatsu* (this scene appears pp. 41-43).

³⁶ Ibid., p. 41.

the women, deep-fried pork cutlet and prawn respectively, which both come with a potato salad side). She can hear fragments of their conversation. One of the girls calculates that most people (assuming they eat three times a day and live to the age of seventy) consume an average of 706, 650 mealtimes in a lifetime. One of the men at the table exclaims that this is 'surprisingly few' (*angai sukunē mon da na*).³⁷ As the waitress sets down Ai's fork and spoon, our protagonist starts to wonder how many tens of thousands of meals she has eaten to arrive at this one. Another customer comes in and, seeing the seat in front of Ai vacant, asks if he can sit down. The man orders spaghetti bolognese. Ai's stew arrives; she is really hungry and butters her bread.

At the start of this scene, both the appetising cream and green of the restaurant, along with the length of narrative devoted to detailing the food orders, convey Ai's desire for food. That Ai notices and remarks upon the liberating colour and movements of the waitresses' skirts suggests that her hunger is able to connect her to a state of 'breezy' transcendence. However, the reader is already aware from Ai's previous confession of the implicit danger in her hunger. Sure enough, in language which is fragmented (and which therefore signals the breakdown of the symbolic order), we are introduced to the idea, even before Ai has begun eating, of food as a continuous mass (an average of 706, 650 mealtimes per lifetime) constantly passing through us, as human waste, as excess, as dung that will be, as that which we will irrevocably exclude and abject. The man's exclamation that the number of mealtimes is surprisingly few reminds us that, by contrast, each meal for Ai becomes

³⁷ Ibid., p. 42.

excessive even after a few mouthfuls. Although Ai continues to feel hunger while she butters her bread, the notion of food as waste is present in the contemplation of meals she has already consumed. As the abject continues to intrude into her narrative, we are presented with a chain of images that pertain both to her real-time situation and the vivid and traumatic memories that this provokes. These become progressively more grotesque in nature and lead both her, and the customer in front of her, to 'abject' their food.

The customer's spaghetti arrives. Ai watches him eat, commenting that it is rather as if he is 'shovelling food into the hole in his face'.³⁸ This prompts a memory of the small dark infirmary at her primary school, which Ai describes at length. There are two large three-dimensional models of the human anatomy in framed-glass hanging on the wall. Below them is a painted white wooden-framed glass cabinet filled with pristine and tightly rolled up bandages lined-up neatly alongside silver tweezers and scissors. The first anatomical model displays the human anatomy in shockingly vibrant primary colours, which makes Ai wonder whether the colour of her own innards are the same, and which, accordingly, brings on nausea. The second frame on the wall has a rectangular brass plate, with 'many kinds of parasites' in black Ming Cho lettering nailed onto it.³⁹ Ai recalls:

In the middle of the frame, six round shapes had been dug out, and in those holes 'many kinds of parasites' were sleeping peacefully, tightly. Among them was one which I always ended up fixing upon; it was a long, thin, cream and white roundworm; this roundworm glistened amongst pink lumps,

³⁸ Ibid., p. 44.

³⁹ Ibid., p. 45.

sleeping deeply. What was that pink stuff that resembled fried-off minced meat? One reason I particularly hate spaghetti bolognese could be that it makes me remember that roundworm.⁴⁰

The customer in front of Ai becomes uncomfortable as she stares at his dish. She 'gives him the smile of a roundworm', and oblivious to its meaning, he smiles back. She asks him 'You know roundworms?' He looks down at the plate as if remembering. 'They look like that. Don't they.' Without finishing the last few mouthfuls the man immediately stands up and exits the restaurant, leaving Ai to wonder if she is 'terribly vulgar'.⁴¹

That the notion of 'waste' becomes transferred from the food onto the man when he starts eating is evident from the way in which, rather than perceiving him as 'eating', Ai describes him as 'shovelling food into the hole in his face'. Depicting him as such, as a performance of mechanical movements in front of a gaping orifice and therefore as a disembodied human presence, he is rendered 'uncanny'.⁴² And this uncanniness is due to the fact that, for Ai, he has become what Kristeva describes as 'the most sickening of wastes', the cadaver. Kristeva writes:

If dung signifies the other side of the border, the place where I am

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 45.

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 45.

⁴² In Freudian theory, to experience the 'uncanny' is to experience something that is simultaneously familiar and incongruous, and therefore which results in the subject's cognitive dissonance, and the object's rejection or repulsion by the subject. For Kristeva, the object is uncanny because it is something that has been expelled out of society and culture, therefore it simultaneously contains that which was familiar before it was expelled, and that which is violently rejected. See Sigmund Freud, 'The "Uncanny"', ed. and trans. James Strachey in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, Vol. 17. (London: Vintage, 2001) pp. 217-56.

not and which permits me to be, the corpse, the most sickening of wastes, is a border that has encroached upon everything. It is no longer I who expel, 'I' is expelled. The border has become an object. [...] The corpse, seen without God and outside of science, is the utmost of abjection. It is death infecting life. Abject. It is something rejected from which one does not part, from which one does not protect oneself as from an object. Imaginary uncanniness and real threat, it beckons to us and ends up engulfing us.⁴³

This elision between food as waste and the customer as waste, and Ai's revulsion at them both suggests that the boundaries between self and other have (or are being perceived as having) collapsed. Here, it is no longer just that the process of living produces constant waste that she must continually discard and abject; even human life is seen as waste, as excess materiality. The customer's transfiguration into a corpse represents a 'real threat' to Ai's existence, because he becomes a physicalised metaphor for her suppressed fear that there is nothing that lies beyond the limits of her own materiality: he is the embodiment of her own mortality. As such he confronts her with her great terror in facing death. This terror, perversely, prevents her from eating and is potentially fatal. This also suggests that Ai's immersion in abject imagery is part of a progressive process, as it is in Kristeva's writings. Kristeva applies the terms 'abject' and 'abjection' to both the liminal state of being wherein the boundaries between self and other are collapsed, and the act of repressing such a state, indicating its progressive but transitory nature.

This process of the abject, the initial collapsing of boundaries between self and other, the intensification of horrific imagery and its association with the

⁴³ Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, pp. 3-4.

self, and eventually the rejection of such association, is illustrated in graphic detail by Ai's narrative. As Ai continues to recollect her childhood memory of the school infirmary, describing her long held association between spaghetti bolognese and roundworms, the image of the cadaver intensifies, repeatedly and menacingly returning in the form of human anatomical models with holes dug out. Their brightly coloured innards 'make [her] wonder about the colour of her own innards'. In other words, they prompt her to consider her body as objectively as she considers the cadaver's. The neatly lined up medical paraphernalia; scissors, tweezers and bandages, also compound this association between her body, which is lined up as an object of examination and surgical treatment, and damaged, infected or dead 'matter'. Ai's response to this is to be sickened, or 'nauseous', and this signals her attempt to violently disassociate herself from the prevailing images of death, to refuse to assimilate herself with that which is abject. As Kristeva writes:

When the eyes see or the lips touch that skin on the surface of milk—harmless, thin as a sheet of cigarette paper, pitiful as a nail paring—I experience a gagging sensation and, still farther down, spasms in the stomach, the belly; and all the organs shrivel up the body, provoke tears and bile, increase heartbeat, cause forehead and hands to perspire. Along with sight-clouding dizziness, *nausea* makes me balk at that milk cream, separates me from the mother and father who proffer it. 'I' want none of that element, sign of their desire; 'I' do not want to listen, 'I' do not assimilate it, 'I' expel it.⁴⁴

For both Ai and Kristeva, nausea is the body's attempt to cast off association with the world of abject imagery and to reassert the identity of the self as clean,

⁴⁴ Ibid., pp. 2-3 (original emphasis).

whole and separate. In this instance, however, Ai finally escapes her alignment with the images of death that have been assailing her by assuming the identity of the roundworm and through a rebellious speech act, which forces the customer to expel his food and leave. The roundworm parasite, the focal image of the passage, transgresses three states of being. Firstly, it is seemingly *passive*: ‘sleeping deeply among pink lumps’, it reminds Ai, through its inert, object-like state, of spaghetti Bolognese. Secondly, it is *liminal*: as a ‘parasite’, it is both object and agent, existing by consuming the host that it lives within. Finally it is *active*, eating and eventually killing that which sustains its life. Ai in this instance, is similarly transgressive on the same three fronts: seemingly passive, allowing the customer to think she is docile with a sly roundworm smile; liminal, in the way in which she crosses the imaginary threshold between herself and the customer; active, by speaking and repelling that which she dislikes. Her revulsion at both the spaghetti bolognese and the customer enables her to reject passivity and death, and therefore reject the social identity (the docile female) to which she is supposed to conform, but which leaves her feeling sickened. Instead she chooses an active but othered identity, an identity that is taboo, and is in turn, repulsive to and rejected by society (as represented by the customer). This again seems to evoke Kristeva’s thesis on the abject, which sets out the notion that ‘abject’ identities inhabit personalities that are immoral and depraved:

It is [...] not lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection but what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite. The traitor, the liar, the criminal with a good conscience, the shameless rapist, the killer who claims he is a savior. . . . Abjection [...] is immoral, sinister, scheming, and

shady: a terror that disassembles, a hatred that smiles, a passion that uses the body for barter instead of inflaming it, a debtor who sells you up, a friend who stabs you. . .⁴⁵

To read *Love Life* alongside Kristeva's theory of the abject, therefore, encourages the reader to situate the novella's protagonist in a broader, 'abject' context; a context of all that conventional society – and conventional literary representations of that society – deems criminal, hateful, deplorable, murderous, and so on. In this way, we can see how *Love Life* finds its place among the cultural output of 1960s Japanese avant-gardism, with its concomitant crisis of representation, a crisis that aligned representations of the self with the defiled, the fugitive and the criminal.

For example, the avant-garde films Ōshima Nagisa's *Hakuchū no tōrima* (*Violence at High Noon*) and Kōji Wakamatsu's *Kyōsō jōshikō* (*Running in Madness, Dying in Love*) both provide us with two clear (and extreme) examples of how criminal and socially subversive identities in 1960s avant-gardism are depicted as abject; and how such identities originate in violent acts of transgression.⁴⁶ *Violence at High Noon* traces the origins of the 'phantom killer' (*tōrima*), Eisuke, who leaves his idyllic but suffocating rural community for the crowded metropolises of Japan, where the anonymity of the city permits him to commit his crimes in broad daylight. Through the memories of his first (rape) victim, Shino, whom, at the start of the film, he tracks down to Tokyo and rapes again, we discover that Eisuke's propensity for violence is rooted in

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 4.

⁴⁶ Ōshima Nagisa, *Hakuchū no tōrima* [*Violence at High Noon*] (Sōzōsha, 1966); Wakamatsu Kōji, *Kyōsō jōshikō* [*Running in Madness, Dying in Love*] (Wakamatsu Productions, 1969).

necrophiliac desire. Prior to her life in Tokyo, Shino has agreed to commit double suicide with her lover, Genji, the newly-elected community leader, whose public electoral success, contrasts with the doubt and uncertainties of his private relationship. Genji's double suicide pact is his way of determining irrevocably whether Shino loves him or not: if she does, she will die with him; if she doesn't, she will survive. Eisuke has meanwhile, been urged by his wife Matsuko, the village teacher, to follow Shino and Genji and prevent anything bad from happening to them. But Eisuke has simply watched from the bushes while Genji hangs himself. Shino attempts to hang herself too, but the knot fails, she falls from the tree unconscious and Eisuke rapes her lifeless body. On reviving, Shino thanks Eisuke, thinking that he had saved her life, but she then realises that he has violated her and demands to know why he had done such a thing. Eisuke answers in his coarse accent '*Ome wa shinitan'da. Shinin wa ningen ja ne. Tada no mono da.*' ('Because you had died. Corpses are no longer human. They're just objects.')⁴⁷ On finally being caught and sentenced, Eisuke asserts that it was this initial act of necrophilia on Shino's body that sparked a desire, and that subsequently he could only fulfil this desire by attacking and raping women throughout Japan.

Kristeva comments, it may be recalled, that the corpse is 'the most sickening of wastes' because it is 'a border that has encroached upon everything', '[i]t is no longer I who expel, 'I' is expelled'.⁴⁸ In other words, we are not able to protect ourselves from the corpse as we might do with other

⁴⁷ Ōshima, *Hakuchū no tōrima*.

⁴⁸ Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, pp. 3-4.

'wastes', such as filth and excrement, because we identify with it, and thus view it with the force of the fear of our own mortality. Eisuke, in his acknowledgement that violating Shino, while she lay (apparently) dead, was permissible precisely '[b]ecause [she] had died', because she had crossed the threshold and become an object, demonstrates that he does not identify with the corpse, or view it with the force of the fear of his own mortality. For this reason he is able to view the corpse opportunistically, as a 'thing' for him to do with as he pleases. Furthermore, the fact that Eisuke does not view the corpse as a dangerous boundary between self and other, suggests that he already occupies that liminal and abject territory. The film does not offer us any originary motive as to why Eisuke already occupies that liminal territory; he is portrayed from the outset as a shady character who is unable to fit in with the rest of the village. However, what is made apparent is that Eisuke's necrophilia, a shameless opportunistic pursuit of sexual gratification from the bodies of the dead, is initially able to thrive in the context of the city; whereas Genji's need for certainty and emotional fulfilment prevents him from leaving his village, directly resulting in the (honourable) taking of his own life. Produced in 1966, just as the immediate post-war-born baby-boomer generation (which constituted the biggest surge in population figures in Japan's twentieth century) started to come of age and migrate *en masse* to the cities, Ōshima's film might thus be seen to be revelatory of the anxieties concomitant with such an immense demographic transition, and with the production of new, city-dwelling cultural identities which it entailed.

Kōji Wakamatsu's *Running in Madness, Dying in Love* also features transgressive protagonists who come to define their identities in opposition to

societal norms and taboos. The film opens with a young student activist running alongside the rail cuttings of the *Yamanote* line, freshly wounded from engaging in political protest in Tokyo. He runs directly to confront his elder brother, a policeman, at his brother's apartment. A heated argument erupts between himself and his brother about the brutality of the police during the riots. The argument is ended by the intervention of the wife of the elder brother, who in a sudden and startling move, takes the pistol from her husband's hip holster and shoots him in the back. Fearing themselves to be wanted by the police, the younger brother and his sister-in-law immediately leave Tokyo and travel north by train. On their journey they succumb to their secretly-held passion for each other, and are unable to decide whether to commit suicide, return to their families, or attempt to run indefinitely. At the end of the film, the pair visit their northern hometown, where, in a stark white field of snow, the elder brother stands to greet them dressed completely in black. The wife, although horrified that he is alive, immediately leaves the side of the younger brother and returns to him.

Like Ai, both the killer in *Violence at High Noon* who reveals that his motivation for his crimes is necrophilia, and the young student and his elder brother's wife in *Running in Madness, Dying in Love* who formulate a sexual relationship, spurn the social values and categorisations to which they are supposed to conform by embracing that which society deems taboo. In so doing, and as Kristeva writes of abject identities, they 'uphold "I" within the Other' and thereby '[shatter] the wall of repression and its judgments'.⁴⁹

⁴⁹ Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, p. 15

However, rebellion through the abject, while it may constitute an important system of rejecting identities forced upon it, comes with the provision that it is always already thwarted precisely because it entails a radical rejection of the self. The serial killer in *Violence at High Noon* and the putative lovers in *Running in Madness*, *Dying in Love* all live temporary, fugitive existences, attempting to defer the moment of their discovery and/or death. All of them are thus still trapped within a system, and in both cases it is this system of law, or civilised society, which prevails. Similarly, in *Love Life*, Ai's alignment with the abject allows her to dissimilate from a passive identity; yet, because such dissimulation entails the abjection of food and because food is sustenance for the body and 'not an "other" for "me"', her rebellion equates to her abjection of her own body.⁵⁰ As such, it cannot result in Ai's liberation from an oppressive system, but is limited purely to highlighting her entrapment within it.

Love Life is the only piece of short fiction from Kanai's early writing career in which she presents us with the single perspective of a female protagonist. It is therefore the only work in which we are ostensibly presented with an unmediated, unitary (if not unified) and gendered subjectivity or perspective.⁵¹ As we saw in the first chapter, in Japanese women's fiction of this period, conventional female first-person narratives might entail a description of 'what it means to be a woman' and centre on experiences of the gendered body, thus creating a 'written feminine'. Yet, *Love Life* is notable, even among Kanai's early works, in not overtly discussing the body of its main

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 3.

⁵¹ Her other novellas of this period all use an omniscient, third-person narrator. They are: *Eonta* (*Eonta*, 1968); *Yume no jikan* (*Dream Time*, 1970); *Kimiyō na hanayome* (*The Strange Bride*, 1970); and *Moeru yubi* (*The Burning Finger*, 1970).

female character as a ‘gendered’ or ‘sexual’ entity. Unlike the prostitute in ‘Rotting Meat’ and the rabbit-girl in ‘Rabbits’, we are not made aware of Ai’s sexuality or, even, her physicality. But the reader is reminded of her body’s *activeness* through its experiences that are concomitant with her abjection of food, including, as we have seen, her hunger, nausea, and increasing anxiety. By focusing on such sensations and memories, the narrative discursively avoids gendering Ai’s active body; instead choosing to situate it within a perpetual cycle of fear and crisis. As discussed above, in so doing it clearly situates itself within the 1960s avant-garde context.

However, how this crisis specifically pertains to the representation of female bodies nonetheless – to (mis)appropriate Karaki Junzō’s phrase – ‘just trickles out’ throughout Ai’s narrative. For example, while still seated at the restaurant, after having repelled the male customer, Ai recalls visiting her aunt in a maternity hospital. She remembers that because the hospital was building a new ward in the vacant land next to the current facility, it was in the middle of knocking down the building that held its medical resource rooms. Lining the staircase are wide necked glass bottles of all shapes and sizes from the resource rooms containing unknown substances, or rather lumps, that are undoubtedly human body parts or organs preserved in formaldehyde.⁵² Ai is unable to walk down the stairs, but F comes up the stairs, looks at her and starts the following conversation:

‘There are babies conjoined by their backs.’

‘Are they big?’

⁵² Kanai, *Ai no seikatsu*, p. 46.

'Quite, yes. About this size I think.'

F demonstrates their size with his palm

'They must have been lined up at some point while I was at my aunt's side. I can't come down.'

'Shut your eyes; I'll give you my hand.'

'I can't.'

'Close your eyes.'⁵³

Ai closes her eyes, takes F's hand and starts walking down the stairs. As she cannot gauge the height of each step, her feet hover in the air. When she gets to the landing she opens her eyes and sees wombs, ovaries, foetuses, pink lumps of cancer, a pinna, and a baby's hand with six fingers all lined up one by one and pickled in formaldehyde. The women on her aunt's ward eventually get used to the smell, but one of them gets reprimanded for saying 'I've just remembered that *thing*' while they are all eating.⁵⁴ The inappropriateness of the woman's comment, then, and Ai's memory of it, are a corollary to the inappropriate comment made by Ai to the male customer. The link between the two then established, Ai's stream-of-consciousness returns to the scene in the restaurant and concludes with her finishing the (now cold) coffee and smoking a cigarette; and this associative link that we are invited to make aligns not only *past* with *present* inappropriateness, but also inappropriateness with the speaking feminine. Both Ai and the woman's comments are transgressive because they challenge the conventional expectation of what a woman might be societally constrained to say.

⁵³ Ibid., p. 46.

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 47 (original emphasis).

In this passage, it is striking that the hospital building is described as being in a state of transition between 'dissolution' (in the process of dismantling and destroying the old medical resources building) and 'reconstruction' (in the process of building a new ward situated in an adjacent vacant plot). Indeed, on one level, the maternity hospital describes the literal state of rebuilding throughout Japan, and particularly in Shinjuku, in the late 1960s at the time *Love Life* was being written. Both Tokyo and Osaka were still in the process of reconstructing themselves in the wake of the War. There remained in places derelict sites of larger, sturdier buildings that had survived the bombings, and pockets of vacant wastelands that were waiting to be redeveloped. But on the other hand, both cities were in the process of radically transforming architecturally during these few years and the construction of local transport systems, grand commercial buildings, vast station concourses and skyscrapers that remain today, gathered great pace in the late 1960s.⁵⁵ When some of these came to fruition in the 1970s, the resulting atmosphere would be very different. For instance, in Shinjuku's western ward, the dilapidated Yodobashi water purification plant closed in 1965 and throughout the late 1960s its land was sanitised and developed. The development of this site culminated in the completion of several distinctive skyscrapers: the Keio Plaza Hotel was completed in 1971, followed by the Shinjuku Sumitomo Building, the KDDI Building, and the Shinjuku Mitsui Building in 1974. By the mid-1970s the skyline of Shinjuku, and indeed the whole of Tokyo, had been

⁵⁵ For accounts of these transformations and constructions see: White, James W. (1982) *Migration in Metropolitan Japan: Social Change and Political Behaviour*, California: University of California; and Watanuki, J. (1992) *Japan in the 1960s and After: The Politics of High-Growth* Tokyo: Sophia University.

irrevocably altered by these giant feats of construction. Their appearances accompanied Japan's newly acquired economic confidence of the 1970s and the heightening materiality of its cultural aims and ambitions. The image of the maternity hospital, then, situated at a time of rupture and crisis wherein the past is in the process of being dismantled even before the future can be concretely materialised, can thus be read, not only as a straightforward literal representation of Japan's infrastructural upheaval, but also *metaphorically* for the concomitant social, political and cultural upheaval of late 1960s Japan.⁵⁶

The architecture of the hospital serves to cue another set of associations that generate potential meanings clustered around the notion of 'woman'. Specifically, in her memory's reconfiguration of the hospital, Ai forces a link between the hospital corridor and (Ai's perception of its resemblance to) a brothel. She writes that: '[e]xiting the hospital ward was a dark narrow corridor that reminded one of a brothel, and at the end of the corridor was a

⁵⁶ Considered another way, we might argue that architecture, or landscape, is never coincidental to the culture, society and politics in which it is situated. Rather it is a three dimensional manifestation of them. As Cotton Mather, P.P. Karan, and Shigeru Iijima note, 'Landscape is the interaction of culture, time, and geographic space. It records what has happened. It is an eloquent transcription of the physical history and the essence of life as it functions in a complex matrix. Landscape is the unvarnished etching of the past and present, of reality [...it is] the consequent compage of the elemental bonds of land and culture.' See P.P. Karan, Cotton Mather, and Shigeru Iijima, *Japanese Landscapes: Where Land and Culture Merge* (Kentucky: The University Press of Kentucky, 1998) p. 1. Nevertheless, it is certainly the case that the architectural transitions during the late 1960s, striking as they were in exposing the present moment as one which was situated within a rupture between past and future, were often foregrounded by avant-garde artists at the time. See for instance, Seijun Suzuki's film *Koroshi no Rakuin* (*Branded to Kill*, Nikkatsu, 1967) and Yoshishige Yoshida's *Erosu purasu gyakusatsu* (*Eros Plus Massacre*, Art Theatre Guild, 1969). Both shoot various scenes either within the ruins and wastelands left over from the war, or within and alongside the new and iconic brutalist and metabolist architecture that characterised Japan's redevelopment.

tap'.⁵⁷ By suggesting a collapse of the distinction between 'mother' and 'whore' through an alignment of the *physical spaces* wherein motherhood and whoredom are performed (the maternity ward and the brothel), Ai's narrative necessarily foregrounds the *roles* that constitute 'women'. The fact that such roles might be *social* rather than 'natural' and therefore *learned* is compounded by the additional similarity Ai's narrative discerns between the hospital building and the institution of the *school*: 'There was a set of steps to the side of the faucet, and these steps had a wide landing like those in a school building (all of which was permeated with the smell of disinfectant).'⁵⁸ As a social institution, the school implements (in Kristeva's phrase) '[t]oo much strictness on the part of the Other', instructing young girls how to deport themselves, while punishing or censoring behaviour which departs from examples of modesty and propriety.⁵⁹ The brothel, in contrast, is where we see (again in Kristeva's phrase) '[t]he lapse of the Other', where women need not abide by rules to cover up or hide their sex, but must instead offer it up for a price.⁶⁰ Consequently, we can see how these elisions between past/present/school/brothel/hospital/restaurant demonstrate clearly how the literary *technique* of stream-of-consciousness lends itself so well not only to the crisis of representation we have *already* identified as being characteristic of 1960s Japanese avant-gardism, but also to the crisis of representation that Kristeva's 'abject' constitutes. Kristeva writes that it is in cases where society

⁵⁷ Kanai, *Ai no seikatsu*, p.46

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 46.

⁵⁹ Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, p. 15.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

produces such contradicting messages that 'a narcissistic crisis' is brought about, wherein the subject becomes unable to perceive herself as whole and clean through the mirror which society holds up, and that this 'provides, along with its truth, a view of the abject'.⁶¹ This appears to be borne out by Ai's journey down the stairs, during which the foundations of her identity are thrown into crisis. That which she at first could only perceive as 'unknown substances', transpire to be none other than women's sexual organs, the mother's body, all that represents life in the chora, including foetuses and parts of babies. These have been extracted, preserved, and positioned on the stairs of the hospital, reflecting back to Ai disturbing images of the mutilation of her gender and physical origin.

The inclusion in the list of preserved body parts of a pinna recalls Kanai's 1971 short story 'Mimi' ('The Ear'), in which the protagonist, an adolescent girl, cuts off her ear at the end of the story. Before the conclusion however, she dreams that she is tightly bound up within her father's ear. On the one hand, the experience is suffocating, but on the other, it is much like being 'wrapped up by a supple rose-coloured flesh cocoon so [the young girl] remains still'.⁶² Kitada, writing on 'The Ear' comments that, while the ear belongs to 'the father', it is nevertheless conflated with a 'motherly image', with, presumably, the 'cocoon' a clear reference to the womb, and the 'supple rose-coloured flesh' evoking female genitalia. Therefore, she argues, the ear in Kanai's works is a symbol that breaks down the differences between the

⁶¹ Ibid., p. 15.

⁶² Kanai Mieko, 'Mimi', in *Kanai Mieko: Zentanpenshū* (Tokyo: Nihon Bungeisha, 1992) pp. 478-93, p. 490.

genders and presents the reader with an androgynous super-ego, which Kitada terms 'an ideal androgynous reflection' (*ryōseigūyūteki na risōteki kyōzō*).⁶³ However, a comparison between Kanai's works and Kristeva's theory of the abject challenges Kitada's interpretation of this symbol. The ear's description as 'suffocating' and womb-like in 'The Ear' aligns with the primordial site of 'the abject', as does its inclusion in a line-up of preserved female organs in a maternity hospital in *Love Life*. That it is aligned with the abject is not to deny that the ear in both its manifestations here is a symbol of androgyny. For Kristeva, because abjection, motherhood, the womb and the process of pregnancy are pre-cultural and pre-symbolic, they are also of indeterminate gender and subjectivity. As she writes:

Cells fuse, split and proliferate; volumes grow, tissues stretch, and body fluids change rhythm, speeding up or slowing down. Within the body, growing as a graft, indomitable, there is an other. And no one is present, within that simultaneously dual and alien space, to signify what is going on. 'It happens, but I'm not there.' 'I cannot realise it, but it goes on.' Motherhood's impossible syllogism. ⁶⁴

Here, pregnancy is described as an organic or biological event that 'happens' regardless of intent; it is a process that requires no agency, wherein the mother's body hosts 'an other' body in a space where neither mother or baby can be said to be present as culturally constituted beings. Thus, pregnancy, the womb and the developing foetus are not abject for Kristeva. This is not because they are processes and entities that pertain to the female gender; in other

⁶³ Sachie Kitada, 'Usagi: Hito to Bungaku', in *Tanpen Josei Bungaku: Gendai*, ed. Teiko Yabu and Sumiko Watanabe Yasuko Imai (Tokyo: Ōfū, 1993) pp. 153-60, p. 159.

⁶⁴ Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, p. 237

words, it is not female gender *per se* which is taboo. Rather (and more radically), they are abject because they pertain to the *genderless, androgynous* origin of all humans and because they are transgressive of the boundary between self and other, male and female. It is this liminal and androgynous origin which must be repressed in order for the individual to be able to conceive themselves as Lacan's 'whole', 'separate' and 'clean' Ideal I during the mirror stage. Therefore, Ai's memory, or vision, of the line of jars containing foetal specimens at the hospital, including that of the pinna, might suggest that she continues to be unable to repress her connection to the severed origin, and is therefore unable to conceive of herself as 'ideal'.

All the other women in the hospital appear to be able to cope better than Ai with the reality of the womb's extraction and pickling in wide-necked jars. However, the black humour at the end of the narrative, when one of the patients mentions the word '*thing*' over dinner, exposes an important distinction between Ai and these women. Namely, that however used to the world of abject imagery the women have become, however much they live among it and are confronted with it on a daily basis, they (on the whole) nonetheless retain the ability to render it 'taboo', to exclude it from their consciousness when necessary (for instance, when eating). This is precisely what Ai has been unable to do. For her, abject imagery protrudes violently into her stream-of-consciousness narrative, seemingly autonomous of her actions, countering her strong desires to eat, thereby threatening her identity, indeed her existence.

Ai's own narrative aim, it will be recalled (an aim outlined to the reader at the start of the novella), is to retrieve and stabilise her memories; framed in

Kristevan terms, she is attempting to retrieve a repressed material reality. The governing logic underpinning such an aim (again, framed in Kristevan terms) assumes that material reality pre-exists the imaginary and symbolic orders into which it is transcribed. Ai's attempt at recovering her memories (and thus at stabilising her own sense of self) also assumes that the subject can subvert the primacy of the imaginary and symbolic order by entering this material reality, and writing (about) it 'truthfully'; the 'truth' being the horrific manner in which our physicalised identity (that is to say, our impression of the reality of the body as being primary) is, in modern society, intellectualised, obscured and alienated. It is here that Kristeva's theory of the abject and (what we termed at the beginning of the chapter) the matrix *Ai-body-presence* meet. In other words, in *Love Life*, Ai's inscription of herself – that is to say, her inscription of herself as being *textually present* (which inscription then stands metonymically for her *physical presence*) is dependent in turn upon her being *temporally present*. This is the paradox at the heart of the written statement *here I am*: the present tense – which operates on the *temporal* plane – has also to function metonymically on the *spatial* plane, as it pretends to *present* the absent speaker (even as it necessarily disavows the possibility of such representation). Hence, just as Ai's claim (in her capacity as a first person narrator) to textual *presence* is subverted by the inevitability of her *absence*; so, too, in Kristevan terms, her *present* writing self's attempt to reclaim her memories is subverted by the *past* repression of those memories.

F-Narrative-Absence

There is a second matrix we need to introduce at this stage, which sits alongside *Ai-body-presence*, commenting on it, reflecting it and problematizing it: this is the matrix I have named *F-narrative-absence*. Before we discuss this second matrix in any detail, however, let us first, by way of introduction, briefly mention the letter that Ai receives from her (nameless) friend. In this letter the friend comments on Franz Kafka's short story, 'The Cares of a Family Man'.⁶⁵ For Ai's friend, this story highlights an ontological problem, which he phrases as: '[is Odradek/existence] a reality beyond illusions, or is it an illusion beyond reality' (*genkaku ijō no genjitsu ka, genjitsu ijō no genkaku ka*)?⁶⁶ The friend thus here proposes that Kafka's short story illustrates that there are two different ways in which we may understand our existence. The first is that it is 'a reality beyond illusions'; or, in other words, that it is a material reality that is

⁶⁵ Franz Kafka, 'The Cares of a Family Man', in *The Complete Stories* (New York: Schocken Books, 1971) pp. 269-70. In this story, the narrator (a family man) describes an object that the children play with as if it is 'a creature', called Odradek. He explains how Odradek, 'looks like a flat star-shaped spool for thread, and indeed it does seem to have thread wound upon it [...]. But it is not only a spool, for a small wooden crossbar sticks out of the middle of the star and another small rod is joined to that at a right angle'. Odradek is thus able to stand upright as if on two legs. Although his appearance seems senseless, like a 'broken-down remnant' of that which had once been an intelligible whole, he is, in his own way, perfectly finished. Odradek appears throughout the house, in 'the stairway, the lobbies, the entrance hall'; sometimes he goes missing but he always faithfully returns to the house again. The narrator often feels compelled to speak to Odradek and asks him questions, such as what his name is, and where he lives. Sometimes Odradek answers and laughs, but often 'he stays mute for a long time, as wooden as his appearance'. The narrator concludes by wondering whether Odradek can possibly die, or whether he will 'always be rolling down the stairs, with ends of thread trailing after him right before the feet of my children, and my children's children', and that he finds the notion that Odradek may outlive him most painful.

⁶⁶ Kanai, *Ai no seikatsu*, p. 21.

obscured by the very narratives we deploy to try and re-present that reality, just as Odradek is nothing more than a wooden spool, an object that the children play with, and not 'a creature' as the children and their father make-believe.⁶⁷ This appears to be a simplification of Kristeva's theory of the abject, in which, as we have already seen, she proposes that there *is* a repressed material reality that hides beneath the symbolic and imaginary orders. This understanding of existence also describes the way in which the abjection of Ai's body traumatically intrudes into her narrative of the present. The second way in which we may understand our existence, however, is that it is 'an illusion beyond reality', or an elusive fiction that cannot be grasped, reduced, or limited to the material world; the very idea of Odradek is predicated upon the fiction of his being a 'creature'; remove the fiction and Odradek necessarily disappears. But if Odradek *is* a fiction, can he ever be said to be truly present, or is he perpetually an absence? It is this question that underpins the second of our matrices, *F-narrative-absence* and that forms the basis of Ai's relationship with, and search for, her elusive husband F.

F may be associated with *absence* in the story; however, we soon run into a paradox, because although F is 'absent', the *fact* of his absence is continually present. We read about the physical traces he has left behind him that morning: the un-washed up crockery from breakfast; an unexpected listening choice left on the record player; and the magazine he has turned open. Further, Ai's narrative often deviates to ponder the meaning of their relationship and her feelings for him. In her memories of past traumatic events,

⁶⁷ Kafka, F. (1971) *The Cares of a Family Man* (trans. Willa and Edwin Muir) in: 'The Complete Stories', United States of America: Schocken Books. pp. 269-270. p. 270.

for instance, the scene at the maternity hospital, he appears and comes to her aid. F also features in all Ai's correspondence with others; when she visits the Shinjuku Jazz Café, *Mokuba*, she exchanges words with a young man who turns out to be one of F's students, he is mentioned in the letter Ai receives from her friend in Kyoto, and again in the conversation that she holds with another friend, the painter. At the end of each of these episodes therefore, Ai returns to the fact that F has disappeared and describes her heightening anxiety, reiterating her hypothesis that he has met with an accident, until it finally transpires he has been at his friend's house all day. Ai's anger at this discovery soon disappears when she witnesses the sudden death of a young couple walking a few paces behind her who are hit by a car just seconds after she has crossed the road.

The search for a missing lover, or for 'the eternal lover' is an underlying theme of many of Kanai's early works. As a trope, it is useful for allowing us to gauge the benefits and limitations of various theoretical approaches, precisely because it raises directly some of the major concerns of contemporary critical theory, and thus actually seems to invite theoretical engagement with it. For instance, in *Love Life*, because F does not, and cannot, exist outside Ai's stream-of-consciousness narrative, theoretical questions surrounding human ontology and psychology, questions of textual presence, textual absence, the inscription of the self, the inscription of the other, emanate from the text and, accordingly, become foregrounded.

Commentators on Kanai such as Kitada Sachie and Shibusawa Tatsuhiko have put forward the theory that the search for F in *Love Life* constitutes a

metaphor for the search for the origins of writing.⁶⁸ In elaborating on how it can be considered as such, the two critics employ profoundly different critical methodologies. Kitada resorts to using a psychobiographical critical approach, arguing that Kanai learned her love of literature and film through both her father, an avid reader, who particularly enjoyed the writings of Tanizaki Jun'ichiro, and her mother, who used to take the young Kanai to the cinema on her back when she was little. Citing one of the few autobiographical accounts written by Kanai, Kitada states that the death of Kanai's father when she was five years old, created a 'physiological vacuum' (*nikutaiteki kūhaku*) and an immovable 'sensation of lack' (*ketsurakukan*) which in turn led her to immerse herself in the world of fiction and fantasy.⁶⁹ Kanai's protagonist's search for 'F' is therefore metaphorical for Kanai's search for her lost 'Father' and constitutes the origins of Kanai's own very personal motive for writing.⁷⁰

In contrast to Kitada, Shibusawa Tatsuhiko, writes that the eternal lover constitutes a 'metaphor for [Kanai's] philosophy of language' (*gengotetsugaku no hiyu*):⁷¹

There is no way of knowing exactly how the slightly old fashioned image of the eternal lover is fixed in [Kanai's] consciousness. However, I wish to draw attention to the fact that the fifteen short stories contained in the collection *Rabbits* are all, via some

⁶⁸ Kitada, 'Usagi: Hito to bungaku' (For Kitada's discussion of the missing/eternal lover see pp. 153-155); Shibusawa Tatsuhiko, *Bungei tenbō* (1974) reprinted in Kanai Mieko, *Kanai Mieko: Zentanpenshū*. Vol. 1 (Tokyo: Nihonbungeisha, 1992) pp. 624-626.

⁶⁹ Kitada, 'Usagi: Hito to bungaku', p. 153. Kitada is citing from Kanai Mieko, 'Oboegaki, Yosei ni tsuite', in *Kanai Mieko Shishū*. Vol. 55, *Gendai Shi Bunko* (Tokyo: Shinchōsha, 1973).

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 153.

⁷¹ Shibusawa, in *Kanai Mieko: Zentanpenshū*, Vol. 1, p. 624.

meaning or another, narratives about searching for a lover. In short, each story departs from the absence of the object of love. [...] It seems it is best to think of this absence as a metaphor for her philosophy of language.⁷²

Shibusawa also explains that, in Kanai's writings, the 'object of love' (*aisuru taishō*) is 'absent' (*fuzai*), not always because s/he has 'disappeared, become separated or died' in the past, but sometimes because s/he is the manifestation, or an image, of a person in the future, an eternal lover who has not yet been met, but who knows one intimately. This symbol or image, Shibusawa posits, is similar to Jung's 'anima' (the ideal female in the male psyche), or 'animus' (the ideal male in the female psyche) and produces a sudden realisation, like an epiphany, that one has again discovered that which is already known. In clarifying the use of his terms, Shibusawa argues that Kanai's eternal lover draws on surrealist images and principles, according to which 'absence' (*fuzai*) is simultaneously 'presence' (*jitsuzai*).

As we saw in Chapter One, the Japanese surrealist concept of *fuzai* shifted over the course of the twentieth century. In the 1930s, artists such as Kitasono Katsue, created works around the concept of *fuzai* or '*shinkū*' (vacuum) which proposed that becoming 'nothing' was the ultimate aim, or essence, of art.⁷³ He displayed, for instance, a vacuum tube as an art installation to represent the doubled negative state of being: the vacuum tube

⁷²Ibid., p. 624.

⁷³Miryam Sas, *Fault Lines: Cultural Memory and Japanese Surrealism* (California: Stanford University Press, 1999) pp. 70-71.

that is ‘nothing at all’.⁷⁴ However his work was criticised after the Second World War by artists Okamoto Tarō and Tsuruoaka Yoshihisa, for the precise reason that the concept of nothingness that it deployed was felt to be nihilistic, weakening surrealism’s subversive potential, and weakening its ability to mount an effective resistance to the oppressive rhetoric of fascism.⁷⁵ In his works, Okamoto instead depicts the cosmic abyss as a space *filled* with the tension of paradox, like the ‘torn mouth of a wound’. For him, the surrealist concept of *fuzai* is not actually absence at all, but rather, an enigmatic presence.⁷⁶

It is this latter, paradoxical, surrealist concept that Shibusawa alludes to in his critique of Kanai’s trope of the eternal lover when he claims that ‘absence’ is simultaneously ‘presence’. In so doing, Shibusawa theoretically aligns Kanai’s writings (as I do in this thesis) with a surrealist avant-gardism. He then goes on to explain the effect that Kanai’s use of the surrealist concept of ‘absence’ creates in her writings:

[... I]n Kanai Mieko’s abstract compositions, ‘absence’ can be considered as a form of presence; our perspective is reversed, and positive becomes negative. [...] It could be argued that the literary worlds that she orchestrates all similarly invert presence, and are negative worlds. Which is to say that the writer makes it look as if she is, throughout the narrative, on the side of ‘absence’, operating language. Or rather, perhaps it is closer to the truth to

⁷⁴ Ibid., pp. 70-71.

⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 53

⁷⁶ See Tarō Okamoto, *Gabunshū Avangyarudo* (Japan: Getsuyōshoten, 1948) p.124.

say that, in simply making the decision to operate language, the writer is compelled to stand on the side of ‘absence’.⁷⁷

In other words, Shibusawa contends that by deploying the surrealist concept of ‘absence’ through the image of the eternal lover, Kanai is able to create literary worlds that, to the furthest extent possible, conceal the writing body, rather than, for instance, attempting to inscribe its presence.⁷⁸ While this may be the case for some of the stories in the collection *Rabbits*, as this chapter discussed at the beginning of its analysis of *Love Life*, Kanai’s debut novella differs from her later writings by narrating from a first person perspective in a stream-of-consciousness narrative; by making several references to shared reality, and through its descriptions of episodes that focus on Ai’s physicalised self. These techniques all work to *foreground*, and not conceal, the writing body; to make it more realistic, or, to borrow Shibusawa’s phrase, to make it ‘stand on the side of “presence”’. However, although his deployment demonstrably does not, as Shibusawa puts forward, render the writer’s body on the side of ‘absence’ throughout the novella, it is nevertheless the case that F, as an abstract and

⁷⁷ Shibusawa, in *Kanai Mieko: Zentanpenshū*, Vol. 1, p. 625.

⁷⁸ Shibusawa is here, as the first quotation from him above sets out, discussing the stories in the collection *Rabbits* and linking them together through their deployment of the image of the eternal lover. However, although Shibusawa’s interpretation that all stories depart from the absence of the object of love holds true for many of the stories in that collection, including ‘Rotting Meat’, for ‘Rabbits’ the importance of the trope of the missing lover is less apparent. Rather, as I argue in Chapter One of this thesis, the paradoxical surrealist concept of ‘absence’/‘presence’ is deployed in both of these short stories through the use of various tropes and images. Indeed, in both ‘Rabbits’ and ‘Rotting Meat’ it is chiefly via the deployment of anonymous frame narrators who identify themselves as writers (and not the trope of eternal lovers), that the reader is invited to question realism of the text, and thus to perceive the author-function as nothing more than narrative convention.

elusive presence, enables Ai to pursue the importance of fiction to her identity.

As Ai writes:

My life with F. Sometimes I wonder what F is to me, but in the end I'm left not understanding. I can only think as others might say, that F is my husband; I love him. Whether this is true or not is not for me to know. F and I are married. F and I are husband and wife. F is my husband. F leaves for work every morning. I am his wife. I love my husband. I exhale these words as if they are sentence examples in a foreign languages lesson. I even try saying them in English and French. But at any rate, they, at the present moment, seem to me like an unshakeable truth. F is a concrete, and moreover abstract presence. Although this is perhaps true of all husbands.⁷⁹

The sentences in this passage at first appear facile. Yet, what they manage is an ontological equation, producing an ethical, intersubjective and non-egocentric selfhood. This is illustrated first by the way in which F precedes Ai in every sentence. Ai also writes 'F is my husband. F leaves for work every morning' before writing 'I am his wife. I love my husband', thus foregrounding him in the overall sequence of sentences in the passage. This is particularly noticeable in the Japanese wherein F is positioned first in almost all sentences:

F to watashi no seikatsu. Tokidoki, watashi wa F ga watashi ni totte nani nano ka kangaeru no dakeredo, sore wa kekkyoku wakarazujimai. Tanin ga iu yō ni, F wa watashi no otto nano da, watashi wa kare o aishiteiru no da, to kangaeru hoka nai. Sore ga hontō ka uso ka watashi ni wa wakarimasen. F to watashi wa kekkon shiteimasu. F to watashi wa fūfu desu. F wa watashi no otto desu. F wa mai asa tsutome ni dekakemasu. Watashi wa kare no tsuma desu. Watashi wa otto o aishiteimasu. [...] F wa gutaiteki

⁷⁹ Kanai, *Ai no seikatsu*, p. 33.

*de, nao chūshōteki na sonzai desu. Arui wa subete no otto ga sō nano desukeredomo.*⁸⁰

The foregrounding of F in both the structure of the individual sentences, and in the overall sequence of sentences, might suggest that Ai conceives F as an *a priori* given, preceding her own existence. Establishing the primacy of F to her identity does not entail Ai's negation of her own existence, however, but allows Ai to construct a selfhood which is contingent on the other, and therefore which is able to make assertions to presence without being founded on the need or desire to possess, reduce or eradicate the other. The contingency of Ai's existence is emphasised by the manner in which Ai precedes her analysis of her relationship with F with several phrases that emphasise the provisional nature of such analysis. She writes, '[s]ometimes I wonder', 'I can only think as others might say', and '[w]hether it is true or false is not for me to know'. By using these expressions, Ai demonstrates that she is fully aware of the provisionality of the truth of her assertions about herself, but also of others' claims to 'truth'. Because Ai acknowledges this provisionality of truth, words float free from her (and others') subjective realities, as if they are 'sentence examples in a foreign languages lesson'. Their detachment from the potential meaning which Ai, or anyone could imbue them with, strips them of empirical meaning. They become a 'fictional' space.

By first creating this fictional void, and next inscribing herself and F within it, Ai's narrative renders F and herself as fictions, or abstract concepts, like mathematical symbols and equations. Clauses such as, 'F and I are married'

⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 33.

and 'F and I are husband and wife', demonstrate how as entities F and I join together to create one state (married) and yet, interestingly, retain their distinction from each other (husband and wife). Although Ai describes their objectification and possession, each by the other with the phrases 'F is my husband' 'I am his wife', she shows how this does not affect their individual agency by stressing their active subjectivity in the following sentences: 'F leaves for work every morning'; 'I love my husband'. These extremely simple statements thus neither implement the definition of the self in antithesis to the other, nor the reduction of the other to the self. Instead they recognise the contingency and primary importance of the other to the self, and thus create an ethical abstract intersubjective mode of being.

In its challenge to the modern relationship with the other, this intersubjective mode of being seems to share many features that Emmanuel Levinas and Luce Irigaray outline in their theories on 'alterity'. The realisation that the act of shoring up the terms of selfhood by fabricating an antithetical other held the potential for catastrophic evil was made particularly pertinent through the rise of fascism, Nazism and the Jewish Holocaust. And, in the aftermath of the Second World War, there was a debate over the development of modern ontological philosophy in Europe, which mirrored the criticism of Okamoto and his avant-garde contemporaries' critique of surrealist philosophy, by pointing out philosophy's contribution to the horrors committed during the war. In this debate, Levinas (among others) was strongly critical of theories that presented a universalistic standpoint, that assumed and excluded difference, and that purported to understand, know, and define everything. He instead emphasised the importance of the unknown, and the plurality of

possibility, in humanist and scientific inquiry.⁸¹ Rather than philosophy informing ethics, Levinas understood philosophy as a primarily ethical endeavour, and felt that it should pursue ‘the wisdom of love’ not ‘the love of wisdom’ (the latter phrase being, of course, a literal translation of the Greek word ‘philosophy’).⁸² In *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, Levinas puts forward that how we conceive our subjective identities is dependent on how we approach that which is ‘other’, and is therefore guided by prior ethical intent. *Totality and Infinity* highlights the manner in which modern philosophy has prioritised ‘rationality’ when establishing its grounds, and both implicitly and explicitly challenges concepts such as Hegel’s *Geist* (Spirit) and Sartre’s *Être-pour-soi* (Being-for-oneself), the former presuming that the superior rationality of the state will align with the spirit of the people, the latter presuming the individual’s freedom to make rational personal choices.⁸³ It asserts that whether authoritarian or anarchic, modern philosophy has sought

⁸¹ Jean Francois Lyotard joined Levinas in this critique of modern philosophy and, as is very often cited, defines the ‘postmodern condition’ in terms of an ‘incredulity towards metanarrative’. By this, he seeks to demonstrate how grand modern narratives had become redundant as they were not able to accurately depict plural perspectives in history. See Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984). pp. xxiv.

⁸² In his earlier writing, including Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority* trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969) which Irigaray specifically critiques, Levinas avoided using the word ‘love’. This is because he felt it to be a vague, even meaningless term, and one that was often taken to imply sinful behaviour. See Corey Beals, *Levinas and the Wisdom of Love: The Question of Invisibility* (Texas: Baylor University Press, 2007) p.28. However, he later went against this initial judgement, and wrote: ‘philosophy is the wisdom of love at the service of love’. See Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise Than Being or, Beyond Essence*. trans. Alphonso Lingis. Vol. 3, *Martinus Nijhoff Philosophy Texts* (Pittsburg: Duquesne University Press, 1981) p. 162.

⁸³ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*. For Levinas’ challenge to the all-encompassing rationality of Hegel’s ‘Spirit’ see p. 208. For his challenge to Sartre’s Being-for-oneself see p. 303.

to eradicate the 'unease' of not understanding and attempted to reduce 'otherness', either to an extension of the self, or to an alien and externalised category.⁸⁴ By presuming to be able to see the 'totality' of self and other in an 'all-inclusive, panoramic view', modern philosophy has mirrored, even supported, an egocentric culture at the root of a hegemonising modern state, whose aim is at best to attain assimilation amongst citizens, or at worst, to violently suppress, or rid, difference.⁸⁵ Levinas' writings instead advocate an openness to that which is other, a readiness to accept it on its terms and to answer its questions, to not presume its reducibility, but perceive it in its limitless difference, in its infinity.⁸⁶

For Levinas, the encounter with this indefinable, irreducible and sublime otherness, which he terms 'alterity', involves a 'calling into question of oneself' and thus *is* the means through which the subject defines and shapes himself, and therefore, 'otherness' has phenomenological primacy over 'selfhood' (which Levinas terms 'the same').⁸⁷ As we have seen through the analysis of the passage above, Ai defines herself through her relationship with the enigmatic presence of F, to whom she gives phenomenological primacy. Furthermore, doing so results in Ai repeatedly calling her (own) self into question. Ai writes:

I do love F. I bet I couldn't live if I wasn't with F. I use the vacuous term 'love' even though I am ashamed of it.

⁸⁴ Ibid. (see both p. 208 and p. 303 in relation to Hegel and Sartre respectively)

⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 15.

⁸⁶ Ibid., pp. 33-48

⁸⁷ Ibid., pp. 79-81 and pp. 187-219

How is it that I love F?

With complete love. Is someone like me able to 'love'? Really have I ever fallen in love? If I do love, why is it? Why do I love? Is it F that I love?⁸⁸

In this passage, Ai's wish to define concretely the self in relation to 'life with F' is confronted by her questioning of her self(hood) and of the meaning of the word 'love,' both of which hinge on her inability to know, limit and define F. Thus, her primary emphatic assertions, 'I do love F' and 'I bet I couldn't live if I wasn't with F' (in which F is rendered the [knowable] object of the sentence), results in '[i]s it F that I love?'.

In the chapter 'Phenomenology of Eros', Levinas describes alterity as 'feminine', and here it becomes not just an abstract concept, but moreover, a carnal, living, sensate being.⁸⁹ This theory was crucial to Irigaray in her project to rewrite the feminine. In 'The Fecundity of the Caress', Irigaray formulates a post-structuralist critique of the 'Phenomenology of Eros' which points out the derogatory alignments that the text makes with the feminine beloved.⁹⁰ 'The Fecundity of the Caress' points out that, whereas the male lover, according to Levinas, 'rises up to the greatest heights' in the wake of the caress, the beloved woman 'sinks into the abyss', thus aligning masculinity with lightness, divinity and the ethical subject, and the feminine with darkness,

⁸⁸ Kanai, *Ai no seikatsu*, p. 34.

⁸⁹ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, pp. 256 -266.

⁹⁰ See Irigaray, 'The Fecundity of the Caress', p. 194. Levinas describes feminine alterity as 'an irresponsible animality which does not speak true words' (See Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 263.)

profanity and the erotic/fallen.⁹¹ This, for Irigaray, perpetuates the suppression of the feminine, denying woman's own call to divinity. Nevertheless, Irigaray considers many aspects of Levinas' depiction of alterity, including that of opening the self to the questions of the other, as fundamental to constructing a new ethical feminine subject. Indeed, a comparison of the passage from *Love Life* quoted above with Irigaray's 1977 essay 'When Our Lips Speak Together' reveals many similarities between Ai's relationship with F, and Irigaray's ethical subject's relationship with the other. Irigaray writes:

'I love you' is addressed by convention or habit to an enigma – an other. An other body, an other sex. I love you: I don't quite know who, or what. 'I love' flows away, is buried, drowned, burned, lost in a void. We'll have to wait for the return of 'I love.' Perhaps a long time, perhaps forever. Where has 'I love' gone? What has become of me? 'I love' lies in wait for the other. [...] When you say I love you – staying right here, close to you, close to me – you're saying I love myself. You don't need to wait for it to be given back; neither do I. We don't owe each other anything. That 'I love you' is neither gift nor debt.⁹²

For Irigaray here, as with Ai in her narrative, love is an open-ended state, it is 'lost in a void', or 'vacuous', and directed towards the unknown and unknowable, to 'I don't know who', to the enigmatic presence, to F. Both passages notably begin with 'I love' and end in rhetorical questions: Why do I love? Is it F that I love? Where has 'I love' gone? What has become of me? That Ai's narrative and Irigaray's essay seem to agree on the concept of love as an intersubjective act divorced from selfish gain is again crucial for asserting that

⁹¹ Irigaray, 'The Fecundity of the Caress', p. 194.

⁹² Irigaray, *When Our Lips Speak Together*, p. 206.

F is not a detractive 'absence' or 'lack', but a positive and enigmatic presence in her narrative. Moreover, it is during the passages in which Ai describes her relationship with F that the specific connotation of her name as an active, viewing subject, who does not position herself in antagonism with the world, but in ethical relation to it through love, comes fully into focus.

However, there are crucial differences between F and 'alterity', particularly in its Irigarayan reincarnation. As we have seen, alterity is defined (by both Levinas and Irigaray) as an 'exteriority', or profound otherness. On the one hand, this otherness is necessarily conceptual, in that it manifests itself in the mind of the subject, who must be predisposed to conceive it positively, and welcome its difference. It is also (again, as both Levinas and Irigaray insist) corporeal; it is a carnal and sexed being, although sexually different from the subject, endowed with the use of all five senses. As we saw in the first quotation on F and Ai's relationship, F is described as a 'concrete and, moreover, abstract presence'. The word 'concrete' (*gutaiteki*) here used to describe F suggests that his presence is in some way material or embodied. And yet, it is striking that F is never described as a 'physical/physiological' (*nikutaiteki*) presence. Furthermore, he only appears through Ai's memories, through her knowledge of him and through her hypotheses about what could have happened to him. He does not appear in the present moment of the narrative to be physically reunited with Ai. Certainly, Ai's relationship with F is not distinguished by the kind of erotic union that Irigaray states is essential to creating carnal memory of the other, and necessary to generate compassion. Therefore, it seems important to question precisely to what extent and in what capacity he is 'material'. As the adjective *gutaiteki* (concrete) can be applied to

abstract ideas and language, I propose that F's concreteness, or 'materiality', is not physiological, but again pertains to his status as a 'fiction'. In his capacity as a 'fiction' however, F nevertheless has a profound effect on Ai's body.

In two specific cases, F's presence acts as an antidote to Ai's immersion in the abject. In the first recollected episode in which this happens, Ai describes waking up at night alone and writing, but suddenly becoming racked with pain, waking up F and trying to tell him how painful it is. She says:

I am seized by an impulse that I cannot explain and fragmented words run off my tongue. At those times without fail, F says *there is no way that I can understand that* and forces me to drink brandy.⁹³

At first, Ai's attempts to write culminate in her descent into the abject, signalled here by the way in which she becomes consumed by a physical impulse, and all meaning and signification, including the very name of the impulse that seizes her, is lost. F is a presence here (whether he is just a manifestation of Ai's consciousness is unclear) capable of physically affecting Ai by numbing her pain through administering brandy. He also provides a non-egocentric motive for her to exit the abject and enter the symbolic, namely, to communicate meaningfully with him.

The second episode in which F's presence has a physical effect on Ai is one we have considered before, in which Ai is surrounded by pickled body parts, and F appears, ordering her to take his hand. To recap: Ai closes her eyes, takes F's hand and starts walking down the stairs. However, as she cannot

⁹³ Kanai, *Ai no seikatsu*, p. 34.

gauge the height of each step, her feet hover in the air. She is then able to look at pickled lumps more closely and recognise them for what they are: the disembodied womb and its contents. Ai is again at this point, surrounded by the abject, by the horrific. Here F's hand provides 'physical' assistance to Ai, at first by enabling her to travel down the stairs with her eyes closed so that she can block out that which terrifies her. However, as her feet 'hover' the process also seemingly lifts her out of her body, so that she is less attuned to the world of the abject, which is experienced through her sense of her own corporeality. This sensation of mild disembodiment enables her to confront the pickled objects. Here, F's presence aids Ai by detaching her from her 'corporeality' enough to enable her to perceive that world as abstract, and this in turn empowers her to identify and describe it.

In both instances given above, F demonstrates himself to be an enigmatic presence, which intervenes between Ai and the abject, and promotes non-egocentric communication. He thus differs in these respects from both an Irigarayan concept of feminine alterity that achieves compassion for the other through intimate carnal interaction and instead, he could be considered as an exemplar of a masculine alterity that achieves compassion for the other through an abstract fictional materiality.

Conclusion

Love Life, then offers the reader two modes of being that it does not presume to resolve and that, as we have already argued, figure as two contrasting interpretive matrices. Within *Love Life's* stream-of-consciousness narrative, both of these constellatory schemata can be read as being integral aspects of Ai's troubled subjective experience, and therefore a necessary part of her 'self'.

(Such a reading, of course, has as its basis a straightforward, representationalist account of Kanai's text. In other words, Ai's narrative account, in this reading, stands as an unproblematic *representation* of Ai's self/personality/mental state/identity, or however one wants to term it.) However, these matrices can also be read as being *separate* from Ai's 'self' (and her sense of that 'self') inasmuch as they figure as an ineradicable 'other' which, individually and together, problematise the notion of an unmediated, representationally coherent first-person narrator. After all, as soon as one conceptualises and reifies one aspect of one's self/personality/mental state/identity, that aspect becomes necessarily *external* to one's (sense of) self. With specific regard to Ai's narrative account in *Love Life*, the first of our matrices, (the abject) *Ai-body-presence*, constitutes all that she necessarily has to repress from her own conception of herself in order to function as a social being; in other words, Ai's narrative seeks to inscribe a material reality that is nonetheless obscured by her imaginary and symbolic orders. The second, *F-narrative-absence* (termed by Ai as 'an abstract, but material presence') constitutes a fiction, or rather a conceptual other for whom she perpetually yearns and whose very absence has actually generated Ai's narrative account in the first place.⁹⁴ Therefore, we can see how, in Kanai's debut novella, the psychic experience of *being/loving/observing* is formulated through a whole raft of narrative preoccupations (body, mind, presence, absence, text, self, other). Although the two matrices described above foreground specific preoccupations among these, and compete with each other for narrative space throughout the novella (so that Ai's experience appears as one which is divided by concerns of her own

⁹⁴ Kanai, *Ai no seikatsu*, p. 33.

corporeality and her husband's absence) this is not to assert that either matrix is ever defined wholly in opposition to the other, nor that any narrative preoccupation within these matrices is inscribed as a discrete conceptual entity. Rather, each of these matrices and their concomitant preoccupations floats in perpetual, liminal relation to the other, able to become neither wholly dependent on the other for its conceptual definition (that difference-with-no-positive-terms that is so fundamental to Saussurean linguistics), nor fully distinct from them.

These two versions of human ontology collide at the end of the novella when death, which has hitherto manifested itself in both Ai's abject visions, and her hypotheses of what might have happened to F, becomes a vivid and real event. Ai is furious after hanging up the phone on F's friend's wife who informs her that he is with them, and starts to wonder where on earth he had been all day. She is almost angry that all her 'hypotheses' about his meeting with a terrible accident and dying had faded in this moment.⁹⁵ She says:

All my hypotheses had simply faded under light. In the first instance, such hypotheses had only been created for the sake of fading away.⁹⁶

But then she overhears a couple rowing behind her. The young woman is furious with the man for saying that he wished to die before turning thirty because he didn't want to turn into a 'lame adult' (*mittomonai otona*).⁹⁷ She tells him that with such an attitude he is already lame, so he might as well

⁹⁵ Kanai, *Ai no seikatsu*, p. 49.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 49.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 49.

commit suicide. They start crossing a crossroad. A car comes round the corner without reducing its speed and hits them. There is a loud noise. Ai instinctively runs to the girl thinking that the man at least might have received his wish. A crowd of people gathers around them. The man's hands and legs are convulsing. The woman lies still on her front, a pool of blood spreading out from underneath her. Ai notices that the woman had been carrying a book; she sees that the covers of the book have come apart, and that the book is lying open next to a bucket of rubbish. She remembers that she had speculated that day that F might die as the ambulance arrives. Ai picks up the book and gives it to the policeman at the scene, telling him it belonged to the woman. She lights a cigarette and says: 'That young woman died. She died with complete ease. Complete ease.'⁹⁸ With tears streaming down her face, Ai runs in the opposite direction of the scene of the accident.

On the one hand, this conclusion could be interpreted as affirming the textual primacy of the 'object' (that underpins our first matrix, *Ai-body-presence*) in describing the nature of human existence. The event occurs immediately after Ai realises that all her theories about F (that arose from her imaginary order and were translated into the symbolic) have been proven to be illusory or false. As she puts it, they had 'faded under light' (*iroasetta*), and therefore cease to grip her, or have any power over her conception of reality.⁹⁹ Moreover, she realises that such hypothetical discourse in itself, is formulated

⁹⁸ Ibid., p. 51.

⁹⁹ Ibid., p. 49.

for the very purpose of ‘fading under light’, for not pertaining to reality.¹⁰⁰ In contrast, the car accident demonstrates to Ai the same message which the abject seeks to impress upon us, namely that the fragile body is not only the root of our existence, but its limits. This truth is conveyed to her here in the present moment, in bright and vivid detail, right down to the young man’s convulsions and the young woman’s pool of blood. The incident highlights that death is mundane, complete and indiscriminate: levelling us all, reducing us to the same.

However, this conclusion could equally be interpreted as affirming the primacy, in accounting for human experience, of our second matrix: *F-narrative-absence*. Ai exclaims: ‘That young woman died. She died with complete ease; complete ease.’ (*Ano shōjo wa shinda. Shōjo wa mattaku muzōsa ni shindeitta, mattaku.*) The brevity of the first statement underscores Ai’s shock at the completeness of death, at its permanent termination of the woman’s life. Her repetition of the word ‘complete’ indicates that both the ‘ease’ with which death completes, and that it is complete, are traumatic to Ai. The woman’s life is unable to repeat, yet Ai repeats the fact that it has been completed. It is here that the symbolic achieves its ultimate purpose in surpassing death by continuing, even after the body has failed, to attempt to understand, describe and explain human existence. This is also demonstrated by Ai’s act of saving the woman’s book from being discarded as rubbish. The notion that text not only surpasses the body, but that it gives scope for plurality of identity and difference of meaning through an endless chain of ‘substitution’

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., p. 49.

is present here too. What goes unmentioned is that Ai is clutching her own (unfinished) chronicle of her life, which is to become the novella that the reader is reading. As we, as readers, do not know what book the young woman was holding, *Love Life* becomes its substitute, the young woman's epitaph.

Chapter Three

The Corporeal Text

Literature begins at the moment when literature becomes a question.

Maurice Blanchot, 'Literature and the Right to Death', *The Work of Fire*.

Introduction

The previous chapter argued how *Love Life's* representation of its protagonist, Ai, can be situated within the context of the cultural output of 1960s Japanese avant-gardism, and seen as an exemplar of the various crises of representation that such avant-gardism critiqued or enacted. Specifically, *Love Life* critiques (and enacts) how that crisis of representation affected the female body; and the prism through which such critique is refracted is an interrogation of what it means to love and to be in love. This chapter considers how Kanai's subsequent writings further explore the relationship between these various phenomena, specifically by examining how Kanai repeatedly sets in play another constellatory matrix of meaning: *text-body-mind*. Again and again, as we will see, Kanai elides the three through her repeated descriptions of *text* as though it is a physical *body* possessed of a *consciousness*. This new matrix features significantly as a trope in Kanai's writings, a trope which Kanai refers to as 'the corporeal text'. Focusing on two of Kanai's essays, 'Nikutairon e josetsu dai'ippo' ('Towards a Theory of Corporeality', 1969), 'Kotoba/genjitsu/nikutai' ('Text/Reality/The Body', 1984), and a piece of short fiction, 'Kūki otoko no hanashi' ('The Story of the Inflated Man', 1974), the chapter aims to show how the dissolution of the conceptual discreteness of

each constituent member of our new matrix operates in these writings as a fundamental challenge both to conventional notions of the acts of reading and writing and, specifically, to the conventional situation of the reader in relation to a given text. In other words, the chapter contends that Kanai's deployment of the corporeal text is a deliberate act that is designed to transform the reader's experiential relationship with the text from that of a passive recipient to one of an active, engaged creator of meaning.¹

Towards a Theory of Corporeality

Kanai's 1969 essay 'Towards a Theory of Corporeality' uses a discussion of the avant-garde dance movement, *butō* – and the relationship therein between the artist and the audience (as well as of literary and theoretical texts on the subject's relation to the body) in order to advance the notion that the body is inseparable from consciousness, and that it holds the ability to think, dream, imagine, and create narrative. Kanai commences this discussion by writing:

'To physically know' (*mi o motte shiru*) is, in fact, the only way of knowing: we each possess our own 'bodies', within which our existence is rolled up; which is to say that, beyond being sure of the body itself, and all the functions which the body contains, we can be sure that this body calls forth both dreams and illusions. In other words, 'to physically know' means that in order to know, the process passes through the body [...].²

¹ The full references for these writings are: 'Nikutairon e josetsu dai'ippo' ['Towards a Theory of Corporeality'] *Gendai shi techō*, 12 (1969), 20-26; 'Kotoba/genjitsu/nikutai' ['Text/Reality/The Body'] in *Obasan no disukūru* (Tokyo: Chikuma shobō, 1984) pp. 62-68; and 'Kūki otoko no hanashi' in *Kanai Mieko: Zentanpenshū*, Vol. 2 (Tokyo: Nihon bungeisha, 1992) pp. 144-52. The story originally appeared as part of a special, themed edition of the literary magazine *Shingeki*, entitled *Sākasu tokushū*, 21 (1974), 138-44.

² Kanai, 'Nikutairon e josetsu dai'ippo', p. 20.

For Kanai, then, body and consciousness are not discrete categories; rather, they are indivisible. The body, therefore, becomes the basis for understanding *all* human experience; or rather, the human *body's* experience of the world is indistinguishable from the human *mind's* experience of that world. Although, Kanai writes, the Japanese phrase '*mi o motte shiru*' ('to know through the body') seems to suggest that there might be another way of knowing (that is to say, for example, to know through the mind), nonetheless, as the body is the host and origin of all human functions, such as being able to see, hear, listen or touch, it is actually impossible to know anything without the body. Furthermore, it is the body that, through all of its experiences, both painful and pleasurable, 'calls forth dreams and illusions'. Indeed, her essay goes so far as to argue that, if there is no discernible distinction between the mind and body, and if 'we are our bodies', then we must also conclude that language and sexuality are also of the body. She writes:

When it is said that the self discovers everything in the body, it goes without saying that 'everything' includes language and sexuality. When I use words and when I behave, my body is always already there; thus I cannot conceive of splitting the consciousness from the body.³

By claiming that one's primary experience of language lies in one's *use* of words, and that sexuality is rooted in our behaviour, and that both therefore are dependent on physical acts, Kanai's essay overturns any assumption that either precedes the body. Instead, for Kanai, precedence lies the other way around: it is the body that operates as a *de facto* 'origin'; the body can be

³ Ibid., p. 22.

reconfigured as the origin for the self, inasmuch as it necessarily precedes those linguistic and socio-biological systems whose manifestation the body permits, and which only then, as a consequence of such physical manifestation, facilitate what we might now term the 'body-self' to interact with, interpret and imbibe the world beyond.

This notion, that the body-self somehow constitutes an 'origin', is not, of course, a self-evident proposition, as we saw in Chapter One when discussing women writers' engagement with the carnal literature movement and Ango Sakaguchi's inscription of *daraku*. Apart from anything else, the very term 'origin' carries within it a whole set of linear, teleological assumptions that, as we have already seen, Kanai's writings explicitly write against and seek to subvert. These difficulties are discussed below, when we move on to examine how Kanai flags up, as a prime exemplar of her concept of the body-self, Hijikata Tatsumi's performances of *butō*. For the moment, however, we need to ask a different, more straightforward question, which is this: to what *end* does Kanai make this claim to the primacy of the body-self? What might a recognition of this conception actually accomplish? However straightforward the question, it should be noted, the answer is nowhere near as straightforward, not least because Kanai's elusive and elliptical writing style seems consciously to resist the straightjacket of linear argument. Moreover, as the actual title of the essay makes clear, her observations are not presented as a set of fully-formed, coherent epistemological certitudes; rather, they should be read merely as intellectual interventions; they are, after all, remarks aimed 'towards a theory of corporeality'. However, one aspect of her argument that we may infer is that, for Kanai, one of the readiest ways to appreciate her

conception of the body-self is through a consideration of such art/text/performance that deals with physical extremes: pain; love; death; birth (both the act of giving birth and the act of being born). It then follows that the consequence of such an appreciation (for both creator of a work and recipient – be it viewer, audience member or reader – of that work) is the newly-awakened transformative potential for a recognition – or *re*-recognition – of the nature of the self. ‘I am now’, Kanai writes, ‘in the middle of this reality, holding a pencil and writing. This pain originates from my moving right hand, and it is strange that the movement of my right hand is at all times faced towards the ordinary meaning of human existence.’⁴ This gnomic conclusion to the essay points the way to how the body-self (in this instance, the *writing* body-self) can use the physical sensation of pain that *is* the act of (in this instance) writing to achieve a heightened understanding of the actuality of the body-self and its relation to the world around it.

Kanai initiates this set of observations on how the sensation of pain serves to enable rediscovery of the body-self, which is in turn experientially transformative for one’s understanding of what it is to *be* a ‘self’, through a discussion of the presentation of what it means to be a loving subject in Hans Christian Andersen’s ‘The Little Mermaid’.⁵ For Kanai, the story melds the

⁴ Ibid., p.24.

⁵ Hans Christian Andersen, ‘The Little Mermaid’, in *Hans Andersen’s Fairy Tales: A Selection*, trans. L.W. Kingsland, intro. Naomi Lewis (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984) pp. 76-106. A brief synopsis of the story amply demonstrates the link between the physical sensation and pain, and the twin acts of *loving* and *being*. The Little Mermaid falls in love with a handsome prince whom she observes from a distance, aboard his ship. Later, a storm hits and she saves him from drowning, taking him to a sandy beach in front of a temple. He is found by a young woman who lives at the temple; on waking, he does not notice the mermaid, let alone know that she has saved him. The mermaid returns to the kingdom under the sea, but she longs for the prince.

notions *pain*, *love* and the *body*, thereby demonstrating how Andersen's short story renders the conventional dichotomy between the mind and the body untenable. Moreover, the Little Mermaid's experience of the *sensation* of loving operates at what we might term the limits of her being: it informs the first, child-like discovery of her own body; it is also the cause of, and reason for, not only her death, but, crucially, of her *physical understanding* of that death. Writes Andersen: she 'threw herself from the ship down into the sea, and felt her body dissolving into foam.'⁶ The moment of her death is not, for the mermaid, marked by a *ceasing of consciousness* of being; rather, it manifests itself as a *physical experience* of dissolution.

She is told that, whereas mermaids can live for three hundred years but dissolve into sea foam at the end of this time, humans have a shorter life span, but an immortal soul. The Little Mermaid, desperate to meet her prince so that he might fall in love with her, goes to ask the Sea-Witch for help. The Sea-Witch tells her that she may exchange her beautiful voice and fish tail for human legs, but that the act of walking will feel as if she is treading upon sharp knives, and make her feet bleed. Nevertheless, the mermaid drinks the potion that the sorceress has prepared for her, loses her tail, and grows human legs. The prince finds her and takes her in to his care without knowing that it was she who saved his life. She dances for him, even though to do so is excruciating for her. He is charmed by her and grows extremely fond of her, but confesses that he does not want to marry her because he is already in love with the young woman at the temple, who, he believes, saved him from drowning. The mermaid watches the prince marry and feels as if her heart is broken. She is told by her sisters that she may return to being a mermaid if she kills the prince with a knife and lets his blood drip upon her feet. However, her love for the prince prevents her from doing this; instead, she throws both the knife and herself into the sea, whereupon, instead of dissolving into foam as mermaids usually do, she is raised into the spirit world and given another chance to achieve an immortal soul.

For discussions of the many ways in which 'The Little Mermaid' has been appropriated both by Japanese and English writers see the recent research by Lucy Fraser: Lucy Fraser, 'Fairy Tale Transformations and Gender: The Little Mermaid's Metamorphoses in Japanese and English' (The University of Queensland, 2013); Lucy Fraser, 'Lost Property Fairy Tales: Ogawa Yoko and Higami Kumiko's Transformations of 'the Little Mermaid'', *Marvels & Tales*, 27 (2013), 181-93; and Lucy Fraser, 'Reading and Retelling Girls across Cultures: Mermaid Tales in Japanese and English', *Japan Forum*, 26 (2014), 246-64.

⁶ Ibid., p.105.

In Andersen's story, of course, one of the clearest narrative juxtapositions of physicalised love and physicalised pain comes when the mermaid, having relinquished her fish tail, walks or dances on her new legs: 'Every step she took was [...] like treading on pointed tools and sharp knives but she bore it all willingly.'⁷ For Kanai, this act of relinquishment, this 'leap of love', is symbolic of the act of faith necessary in submitting the self to the physical experience of love, and specifically to the pain that this involves.⁸ Her receiving human legs and walking in them for the first time operates as a metaphor for the way in which (the act of) love constitutes 'a discovery of the body':

It is not because the little mermaid wishes to live outside of love, but because the leap of love is synonymous with a discovery of the body, that in order for the mermaid's love to be fulfilled, or rather, because love itself connotes pain, she abandons that which is natural to her body, her fish tail, exchanging it with a pain that pierces her entire body in order to receive human legs and walk. [...] Through the experience of walking step by step in excruciating pain [...] the mermaid's love finally brings her before death.⁹

Love, then, is an emotion which provokes physical sensations (in this case, the sensation of excruciating pain). Accepting Kanai's conception of the body-self, however, allows us to reformulate this sentence: physical sensations (such as the sensation of excruciating pain) permit the understanding that one is experiencing the emotion called love. And it is this understanding that allows us to see how the term 'origin', mentioned above, comes to acquire a resonance

⁷ Ibid., p. 98.

⁸ Kanai, 'Towards a Theory of Corporeality', p. 20.

⁹ Kanai, 'Nikutairon e josetsu dai'ippo', p. 20.

or meaning whose temporality has to be redefined as being *cyclical* (hence a constant *presence*), rather than *linear* (hence an *absence* belonging to, and deriving from, a single, past moment). Each time the mermaid puts her foot upon the ground she endures the physical experience of love anew. This constant, eternal *re-experiencing* of love, as though each time were the first time such an experience occurred, constitutes a never-ending cycle of constant *re-understanding* of what it means to love, which in turn necessarily functions as a constant *originary*, child-like act of *beginning* to experience and/or understand. Paradoxically, however, this act of loving, as a constant cycle of originary experiences, exists through and informs the body-self right until the moment of death. As Kanai writes:

From love, we have no means of escape. It is a kind of meeting with otherness; the significance of our acquaintance and its true meaning to us is only revealed at the very end (*'kyokugen e iku made'*, lit. 'until we reach its furthest limits'). And it is there, at the end, that the origins of the ancient, romantic, yet eternally incomplete dream, are relinquished. Which is to say, we die of love.¹⁰

Kanai's essay thus presents Andersen's inscription of love as an exemplar of originary experience, wherein 'origin' is, as we have seen, a reoccurring physical event, which manifests itself as a constant presence. If we examine and analyse further the inscription of love as exemplifying a cyclical originary experience, it becomes apparent that it is driven by two main factors: the first is the disassociation, or alienation, of the self from the body (represented, in Andersen's story, by the mermaid's abandonment of the fish tail); the second is the concomitant (re)discovery of the body as origin (represented, as noted

¹⁰ Kanai, 'Nikutairon e josetsu dai'ippo', p. 20.

above, by the mermaid's appropriation of human legs and her act of walking on them). Love, as an enactment of originary experience, is thus equivalent with the rediscovery of the self, and is therefore not so much a 'retrieval' of a past origin or moment, but instead signals the creation of a new (or, more specifically, *renewed*) awareness or sense of love which is born simultaneously with the 'return' to that origin and the rediscovery of the self. However, the new origin and hence our 'return' to it – like each experience of walking on sharp knives – ends as soon as it takes place.

The attempt to 'return to origin' (or, in the case of the mermaid's love, as Kanai writes, to 'realise' the significance of the meeting with otherness) thus necessitates the foregrounding of the temporal extremities of existence, *birth* and *death*, while pulling each of these extremities into the present moment. This latter point needs qualification as, of course, it is misleading to configure *birth* and *death* as being experiential opposites: birth is a constituent part of the act of being alive; death, however, can never be considered as being an experience, as such, precisely because it can never *be* experienced: the man who is tortured to death can experience the torture, but never the death. Instead, it might be more productive, in this context, to deploy the terms 'birth' and 'death' *figuratively*, to mean, respectively, the *conceptual-beginning-of-one's-life-experiences* and the *conceptual-end-of-one's-life-experiences*. In other words, the cyclical, eternal return to origin functions as a challenge to conventional, chronological ways of accounting for one's life-experiences. The body-self, through its existing in a constant state of in-betweenness and liminality, doesn't merely foreground in perpetuity these twin extremities, *birth* and *death* (as we have glossed them): it also forever challenges their, as it were,

narrative supremacy, when it comes to accounting for the nature of human experience. Moreover, we can see that the body-self's necessary understanding of itself as being constantly in the *present* (birth and death, as we now understand them in this context, corresponding to, respectively, *beginning* and *end*, *past* and *future*) leads us to a recognition of how Kanai's conception of the body-self might have profound implications for her own writing practice, and for our understanding of, and engagement with, that practice. We shall have more to say about this below. For the moment, however, let us note that Kanai's urging on her readers a conception of the body-self as being a constant *presence* constitutes an important avant-garde strategy in (re-)shaping that readership's understanding of the techniques that necessarily need to be deployed, or rejected wholesale, in the act of inscribing such a conception. Put simply, the body-self demands to be written about in *new ways*.

Moving towards a fuller consideration of the question of how Kanai's conception of the body-self has a material consequence for her own writing, we come first to her essay's engagement with a different aesthetic practice: the avant-garde dance movement, *butō*.¹¹ Kanai begins her discussion of *butō* by

¹¹ *Butō*, its participants, and its contribution to the avant-garde movement are all explored in: Susan Blakely Klein, *Ankoku Butō: The Premodern and Postmodern Influences on the Dance of Utter Darkness* (Cornell: Cornell University East Asia Program, 1988 [Cornell East Asia Series, Number 49]); Thomas R. H. Havens, *Radicals and Realists in the Japanese Nonverbal Arts: The Avant-Garde Rejection of Modernism* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2006); and, more recently, in Bruce Baird, *Hijikata Tatsumi and Butoh: Dancing in a Pool of Gray Grits* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012) and Miryam Sas, *Experimental Arts in Postwar Japan: Moments of Encounter, Engagement, and Imagined Return* (Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard University Press, 2011). For a comparatively straightforward biographical account of Hijikata and *butō*, see Stephen Barber, *Hijikata: Revolt of the Body* (London: Creation Books, 2006; later edition Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press [Solar Books imprint] 2010).

widening her observations on 'The Little Mermaid' to include other stories of Hans Christian Andersen. She notes that:

[...] whether it is legs that send pain all through the body in the act of walking, or whether it is Princess Elisa's bearing of the pain of treading on nettles with bare feet, or whether it is the girl who is consigned to dance for eternity when she puts on the red shoes and finally cuts off her feet, there is no mistake that the act of stepping corresponds to the pain of being on the earth.¹²

The motif of the young woman walking/dancing-in-pain occurs not only in 'The Little Mermaid', then, but also in Andersen's other stories of 'The Wild Swans' and 'The Red Shoes';¹³ and it is this motif of the woman dancing in pain which, Kanai writes, informs the *butō* performances of Hijikata Tatsumi.

***Butō*, and the Dancing-Girl-in-Pain**

Butō (or, as it was originally termed, *ankoku butō* [dance of darkness]) was a form of dance developed by Hijikata and Ohno Kazuo in the late 1950s and early 1960s.¹⁴ Before we detail Kanai's engagement with it in her essay, we

¹² Kanai, 'Nikutairon e josetsu dai'ippo', p. 21.

¹³ In the former, Elisa discovers her eleven brothers have been turned into wild swans by their wicked stepmother. In order to break the spell, and turn her brothers back into handsome princes, she has to pick nettles from the churchyard and bruise them with her feet, regardless of the pain that this causes her. In the latter, a vain and spoiled girl demands that her rich adopted mother buy her a pair of beautiful red shoes. The magic shoes cause her to dance ceaselessly; even after she despairingly has her own feet amputated, the shoes continue to dance and torment her.

¹⁴ Kanai's essay omits to mention her own participatory forays into the practice of *butō*. We know, however, from the *butō* dancer and choreographer Kasai Akira (a disciple of Hijikata), that he practiced *butō* with Kanai at least twice. His epistolary essay to Kanai (where he mentions these two occasions) is appended in her collected poetry. Kasai Akira, 'Sore wa ai ka shi ka soretomo yume ka: Kanai Mieko e no shishin' ['A Private Letter to Kanai Mieko: Was That Love, or Poetry, or a Dream?'] in *Kanai Mieko Shishū* (Tokyo: Shinchōsha, 1973) pp. 136-44, p. 141.

might fruitfully make some prefatory, clarificatory remarks about the dance form itself (if the very term 'form' isn't too conceptually prescriptive or, at any rate, antithetical to *butō*'s avowed aims). To achieve its aims, and to explore its own philosophical pre-occupations, *butō* departed from other dance traditions and movements, such as ballet, classical Japanese dance and contemporary dance. As Klein states: '*Butō* choreographers had no compunction about regarding these traditional dance forms as a kind of treasure trove of technique, gesture, and principles, which could be appropriated without regard to their original context or meaning, stripped down, and transformed into *kata* (a vocabulary of movement patterns).'¹⁵ While sometimes parodying and mocking the stylised movements of these other dance traditions, then, *butō* nonetheless resisted all classificatory labels, seeking to avoid the crystallisation of a consistent, formal style of its own in favour of wild, improvisational and unexpected moves and positions: '[a]lthough many of these movements and gestures had quite specific meanings within their own traditional context, those meanings were stripped away in the appropriation process, becoming unintelligible (or unreadable) to the viewer.'¹⁶ These magpie-like acts of cultural appropriation then find themselves lent a philosophical coherence; accordingly, as Miryam Sas argues, *butō*, as an art-form shares some of the pre-occupations of Japanese surrealism. In particular, she contends, they both strive for an

anti-conceptual search for a terrifying limit-moment, a breakdown of symbolic systems – the moment of approach to

¹⁵ Klein, *Ankoku butō*, p. 21.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p.21.

actuality and the body, which they conceive in paradoxical and unexpected ways. Both movements [...] aspire to effect a radical decentering of conventional systems of thought and consciousness, a rupture of existing symbolic frameworks. By varying means, they work to reach a space of '(sur)reality' or 'actuality' beyond socially defined boundaries of understanding.¹⁷

Here, as Sas later explains, 'actuality' connotes 'the existent pain of reality' which was considered by Hijikata and other avant-garde artists to be glossed over by mainstream culture, and the banalities of the humanistic discourses that underpin and inform it, from the average, television-watching Japanese consumer.¹⁸ By reaching a space of 'actuality' through performance, *butō* was contrived to deliver society the shock of 'terrorism' or 'scandal', or 'the pleasure of a bloody nose'.¹⁹

Returning to Kanai's essay, we can see how she explicitly links the various princesses and mermaids of Andersen with the performances of Hijikata. Specifically, she discerns in the physicality of Hijikata's performance – and by 'physicality' we might explicitly mean the indivisibility of the dancer from the dance – the same originary presence that she finds in the mermaid's act of loving/being/dancing:

¹⁷ Sas, *Experimental Arts in Postwar Japan*, p. 159.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 166.

¹⁹ Shibusawa Tatsuhiko, 'Zen'ei to sukyandaru' ['The Avant Garde and Scandal'] in *Shibusawa Tatsuhiko Zenshū* (Tokyo: Kawade shobō, 1993) pp. 356-57, quoted in Sas, *Experimental Arts in Postwar Japan*, p. 160. In her discussion of Hijikata's theoretical writings on *butō*, Sas writes extensively on Hijikata's friendship with Shibusawa Tatsuhiko, the Francophile translator, writer and literary critic. Shibusawa was also closely associated with Kanai, engaging in head-to-head discussions with her on literature, from the 1990s onwards, and, as we saw in Chapter Two of this thesis, has critiqued Kanai's writings, analysing their use of the trope of the eternal lover.

Anyway, for me, the strange power of these women's bodies can also be read in some of the specific movements of Hijikata Tatsumi's dance. Our initial response to Hijikata's body is to the decisive power displayed in the way his ribs stick out. [...] The moment he appears on the stage, we have no choice but to hold our breath and take in his strange appearance. [...] He appears standing before us like a demon etched with all the pain that the body suffers. In this moment, Hijikata imparts the audience with the specific visual experience of his peculiarly honed body, a feeling of indescribable pain is brought to the audience's bodies and this phantom-like body's violent invasion of the audience commences.²⁰

In this passage, Kanai seeks to convey how both Andersen's stories and Hijikata's *butō* performances inscribe or enact what we might term 'originary pain' and how origin, or originary pain, is able to transmit across the perceived boundaries that are conventionally considered to separate the writer or dancer from their audience, manifesting itself as a physical experience, or presence, among them. Kanai's conclusion, 'a feeling of indescribable pain is brought to the audience's bodies ... [as Hijikata's] phantom-like body's violent invasion of the audience commences' is particularly illustrative of this point.²¹ Kanai's understanding that *butō* is able to affect its audience physically is further highlighted by the linguistic choices she makes to frame her argument. For instance, the following sentence: '*Hijikata Tatsumi no nikutai kara saisho ni ukeru kandō wa, sono abarabone no ukidekata ga ketteiteki na chikara de motte sayō suru to itte yoi de arō.*' has been translated above as: 'Our initial response to Hijikata Tatsumi's body is to the decisive power displayed in the way his ribs stick out.' However, the Japanese original conveys more precisely the sense that something physical or tangible is passed or transmitted from Hijikata's

²⁰ Kanai, 'Nikutairon e josetsu dai'ippo', p. 21.

²¹ Ibid., p.21.

body to his audience than this translation. This apparent physicality of the audience's experience is expressed in part by the noun *kandō*, which in its verb form *kandō suru* literally translates as 'to be moved (by emotion)' rather than 'to respond'; and which therefore strengthens the sense in which a physicality might feature in the audience or viewers' reception/perception of performances beyond that which is articulated in the English translation above. Furthermore, Kanai's sentence describes the audience's tangibly 'receiving' this movement of emotion 'from' Hijikata's body (*kara [...] ukeru*), and thus makes full use of the fact that it is grammatically possible to describe performances and the responses they elicit as if they are physical or material entities that are given and received between bodies. In Kanai's interpretation of Hijikata's *butō*, then, the audience becomes an integral part of the performance; which is to say that their bodies function as a medium through which Hijikata's art finds expression and enactment. But moreover, Kanai's text makes it apparent that this notion that performance (particularly performance which explores the limits of being and evokes existent pain) is able to transmit physically transformative experiences, ultimately rests on an understanding of the body-self, not as a discrete entity in fundamental isolation from the environment around it; but, rather, as one which is enmeshed within a wider matrix of bodies and selves, which intersect across performance spaces. For instance, Kanai writes, '*Sate, kanojotachi no iyō na chikara ni yotte tsukiugokasareru nikutai wa, Hijikata no buyō no aru tagui no miburi no uchi ni yomitoru koto ga dekiru mono to watashi no naka de musubitsuki no da.*'²² This has been rendered above as: 'Anyway, for me, the strange power of these women's

²² Ibid., p. 21.

bodies can also be read in some of the specific movements of Hijikata Tatsumi's dance.' However, a more literal translation of this sentence would be: 'Anyway, the strange power of these women's bodies and a thing that can be read in some of the specific movements of Hijikata Tatsumi's dance *are connected inside me.*' The statement that the two are *connected inside* Kanai is a little awkward linguistically; hence the first translation, being more readily understandable, was preferred. Nevertheless, it is the very notion that our bodies are as physical meeting points in a vast web of bodies, selves and texts which connects the dancing-girl-in-pain motif as it occurs in Hijikata's dancing to Kanai's later concept of the 'corporeal text'. To explain further, it is necessary to first turn to the theoretical writings of Hijikata himself, in which he attempts to theorise and describe how *butō* effectively generates the same constant cycle of re-origination that Kanai discerns in the act of loving-being-hurting that, as we discussed above, Andersen's women perform, and moreover, how the dancing-girl-in-pain's appearance in a *butō* performance indicates what can only be described as a physicalised collective unconsciousness.

Dancing Girl in Pain is, of course, the title (or, at any rate *one* title; it is also translated as *Ailing Dancer*) of Hijikata's hard-to-categorise, quasi-autobiographical narrative in which he reflects, somewhat esoterically and poetically, on life, art and the body's relationship with the world around it;²³

²³ Hijikata Tatsumi, *Yameru maihime* [*Dancing Girl in Pain*] in Tanemura Akihiro, Tsuruoka Yoshihisa, and Motofuji Akiko, eds. *Hijikata Tatsumi Zenshū* [*The Complete Works of Hijikata Tatsumi*] 2 Vols. (Tokyo: Kawade shobō shinsha, 1998). *Dancing Girl in Pain*, in Sas's words, 'an experiment or practice of mingling thought and matter, language and flesh' (Sas, *Experimental Arts in Post-War Japan*, p.173), not only resists the *temporal* strictures of a conventional linear narrative, but actively seeks to dissolve the limits of *spatiality* in its account of the relationship between the child-man narrator and the world 'around' him. A full discussion of the text is outside the scope of the

and the importance of the motif to an understanding of his theories about *butō* cannot be understated. For Hijikata, the dancing-girl-in-pain is a materialised image, or vision, which appears when the dancer and the dance (or, to be more precise, when the act itself and the impetus to act) become indivisible, and the performance thus produces a new physical presence which is able to extend out of and beyond the dancer's body. In other words, the dancing-girl-in-pain's appearance signifies a moment of intense creativity within the dance, in which both the dancer's body and the space around it are transfigured in a manner which also physically affects the audience.

Hijikata's use of the motif of the dancing-girl-in-pain to describe such moments is cited (and translated) by Sas in an excerpt from Hijikata's 1974 essay 'Sen ga sen ni nitekuru toki' ('When the Line Begins to Resemble a Line') which reads:

It is true that an act lets out its first cry of birth at precisely the moment when it refutes [all] acts. But because of this, at the moment of action people tend to forget the origins of their expressions. What we usually call expression is, in fact, the name of that which has forgotten its origins. Expression is something that is secreted of itself, not something that appeared as a pattern for some purpose. [...] Then again, there are times when acts pierce us suddenly before we have a moment to catch our breath.

present argument. However, in the way its narrator is constantly transformed in, by and into the world that surrounds him, it is strikingly similar to Andersen's account of the little mermaid's dissolution into the sea foam, and her subsequent existence in the air as a disembodied spirit: 'But I was carried along in the flow of colors around me I became like the pale heroic Kurama Tengu [the popular folk-hero of both novel and film] under the high heavens, an existence that no one would understand, and I moved with great care, hemmed in by the air around me. The kind of body about which one feels certain (yes, this is I) was being taken away from me. My thoughts, like moving pictures – where among material phenomena were they trying to insert themselves? – were bathed in a waterfall of light mixed with dust falling through a hole in the roof. This heroic ghost-horseman under the waterfall of light mixed with dust stopped doing anything but sucking up the seeds of fingernails, and I started to resemble the seed of a fingernail' (Hijikata, *Yameru mairime*, p.69; quoted in Sas, p.173 [trans. Sas]).

At that moment, like that pierced emptiness, we ever so vividly – our own dancing girl comes into existence.²⁴

Hijikata's circuitous description of the way in which 'an act [...] refutes all acts' thus forgetting 'the origins of their expressions', is rendered more fathomable once it becomes apparent that such circuitousness is due to his subscription, not readily discernible in the above quotation, to the working hypothesis (one with which we are already familiar through our analysis of Kanai's essay) that body, consciousness, and self are not discrete conceptual entities, and that all human experience is primarily physical.²⁵ Hijikata's subscription to this hypothesis becomes apparent in the way his prose takes those various abstract acts (such as the act of refutation, the act of forgetting, the act of cognition), acts whose agency might be conventionally regarded – precisely because of their abstraction – as deriving from the conscious mind, and instead inscribes their agency as *deriving from the body itself*. Put more starkly: refutation becomes a physical act; forgetting becomes a physical act; cognition becomes a physical act.

Indeed, Hijikata goes one stage further, inasmuch as he seems to imply that the gestures that comprise these (conventionally abstract) acts do not merely represent the precedence of the *physical* over the *mental* in determining, and accounting for, our perception of experience; instead, the

²⁴ Hijikata's essay 'Sen ga sen ni nitekuru toki' ['When the Line Begins to Resemble a Line'] originally published in *Gendai shi techō*, 17(11) (1974), 243-47; republished in: *Hijikata Tatsumi Zenshū*, Vol. 1 (Tokyo: Kawade shobō, 1998) p. 266; and translated by and cited in: Sas, *Experimental Arts in Postwar Japan: Moments of Encounter, Engagement, and Imagined Return*, p. 162.

²⁵ Sas, *Experimental Arts in Postwar Japan: Moments of Encounter, Engagement, and Imagined Return*, p. 162.

movement *itself* precedes the body's inhabiting of it. This is because, for Hijikata, 'origin' resides in the *physical momentum* behind the gestures, acts, and expressions which the body performs, such physical momentum residing, presumably, within the performance or dance. Thus, his text refuses to adhere to any further conventional distinctions one might choose to make between the actor and the act, the dancer and the dance, and instead focuses on describing the *physicality* (which we glossed above as the indivisibility of the dancer and the dance) at work in *butō*. Breaking the body-self down into an assemblage, or manifestation of various acts and gestures thus also allows Hijikata to discuss (as he does above) the way in which the body-self is a site of competing modes of being and understanding without resorting to, and thereby without reaffirming, that straight dichotomisation of body and mind which *butō* attempts to move beyond. Nevertheless, precisely because the passage above seems to be explicitly describing conflicting understandings of the origin of the self, in order to render his text in more conventional and familiar terms, it is helpful if we temporarily restore the classical distinction of body and consciousness, if only to see more clearly how Hijikata attempts to dismantle such a distinction.

The first thing to clarify is that, despite his claim that 'origin' resides in performance which necessarily precedes the body-self, Hijikata still has to account for the *impetus* to move/be; or rather, he needs to account for how *we* account for the impetus to move/be. A conventional binary opposition between body and mind might see the former moving at the behest of the latter, with the latter's being forever the dominant category in such an opposition; the body, in other words, might conventionally be regarded as being in a permanent state of

obeisance towards the mind. It is precisely such a binary opposition that Hijikata seeks to subvert (and it is important to remember that it is a *subversion*, rather than a mere *inversion*). In other words, for Hijikata, this binary opposition effectively derives from a mistaken narrative of how we account for our actions: because 'an act lets out its first cry of birth at precisely the moment when it refutes [all] acts, [...] at the moment of action people tend to forget the origins of their expressions....'²⁶ Our own *conscious recognition of / accounting for a given act* (the first cry of birth of an act) supplants any understanding that the impetus to act arises from the body-self, in that such a recognition/account creates the perception that the conscious *recognition* of the act was, instead, the *intention* to act. Our habituated adherence to conventional notions of selfhood as residing within the conscious mind, is therefore responsible for generating the misunderstanding that it is our conscious decision to act which generates our actions. On the contrary, for Hijikata, this conscious decision, like any act of consciousness, necessarily originates (as Kanai also argues in her essay) in the physical realm. Hence, Hijikata writes that, '[e]xpression is something that is secreted of itself, not something that appeared as a pattern for some purpose'.²⁷ In other words, the understanding that a given set of acts is a deliberate and intended expression of a consciousness that precedes the movements of the body, is erroneous. Instead, physical expression originates, or gains its impetus, from the movements of the body in dance.

²⁶ Ibid., p. 162.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 162.

In contrast, however, to our tendency to attribute the impetus of our actions to the conscious realm, there are times, according to Hijikata, when we are surprised, even assaulted, by our own acts, as he writes: ‘there are times when acts pierce us suddenly before we have a moment to catch our breath’.²⁸ Such acts thus create a corporeal awareness of the physicality of our origin and its impetus – an awareness which, for Hijikata is distinguished by a feeling of acuteness, or sharpness, which he articulates as the pain of being ‘pierced’.²⁹ Thus here, Hijikata’s prose reveals that, for Hijikata (and, as Kanai’s essay points out, for Andersen) experiencing the physicality of the self and its origin is tantamount to a form of pain and, in particular, such an experience evokes the sharp pain of being stabbed or pierced as if by knives. Put differently, as we may remember from the discussion above, Sas posits that *butō* performance aims at reaching a space of ‘actuality’: a sense of reality that does not gloss over ‘existent pain’, but which instead delivers such pain as a shock, or a ‘scandal’ to its audience. Thus, what Hijikata here appears to be describing by ‘acts [which] pierce us suddenly before we have a moment to catch our breath’ is the very moment in which this space of actuality is entered by the performer.³⁰

As should be readily apparent, this aim of seeking out the attainment of actuality aligns, as we saw in Chapter One, with the surrealists’ search to reject linear narrative methods that unproblematically accept, re-inscribe and reinforce the world ‘as it is’, instead preferring, in their artistic output, to emphasise states of tension and irresolvable paradox. *Butō* similarly rejects all

²⁸ Ibid., p. 162.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 162.

³⁰ Ibid., p. 162.

dance forms (such as classical ballet, *kabuki* and modern dance) which carry out a set of pre-established moves. Instead, through a process of appropriating and mimicking a range of movements from these dances, *butō* crucially works to achieve the reverse of any formal coherence, and to break up those recognisable narratives and the linear rationalisations of the mind which obscure the body's precedence in origin, while arriving at a state of awareness of the physicality of the self in each moment. That this state of awareness is reached through a fragmentation of narratives of the self explains why Hijikata concludes his description of such moments of awareness with the disjointed, final line: 'At that moment, like that pierced emptiness, we ever so vividly – our own dancing girl comes into existence'.³¹ The phrase 'pierced emptiness' implies that the attainment of the space of actuality, wherein origin is experienced as a sharp pain, is also a space devoid, or 'empty', of signification which would ordinarily construct the self. Here, modern linear narratives have been successfully fragmented. As the dancer moves through this space of actuality, and hence beyond conventional explanations of the self, they articulate a *collective or shared being* so 'vivid', so tangible and dynamic, that Hijikata envisions it as a body that belongs to, but is disjointed from both the dancer and the audience, as 'our own dancing girl'.³² In other words, the dancing girl seems to represent to Hijikata the principle that existent pain is not, at the moment of its articulation, experienced solely by the dancer, but by the entire audience. For Hijikata the motif of the dancing-girl-in-pain is thus, as

³¹ Ibid., p. 162.

³² Ibid., p. 162.

Kanai points out, precisely as she is in Andersen's narratives: a symbol of our shared origin, a sign of our connectedness to one another.

Text/Reality/The Body

It is precisely the understanding of the body-self as an originary site through that the limits of being (pain, love, birth and death) manifest themselves which is fundamental to Kanai's idea of 'the corporeal text' (*nikutaiteki na kotoba*), wherein text that explores and tests the limits of conventional narrative meaning(s) is able to materially transform the reader's experience from being passive to being participatory; from being merely a *reader* to being an active, creative (re-)writer. Before we examine this idea, however, we should note how the essay of Kanai that discusses the corporeal text, 'Text/Reality/The Body', directs us, in the first instance, to a similar understanding of the body as that presented in 'Towards a Theory of Corporeality': that it functions as a site of consciousness and sentience, as a physical entity that is forever engaged and interactive with its surroundings, able to transform itself and others through the exploration of its own limits and limitations.³³ However, the body is viewed in 'Text/Reality/The Body' through a consideration and critique of prevailing cultural representations of text, reality, and the body, which culminates in the essay's depiction of *text* as a conscious, sentient and interactive *body*. In so doing, 'Text/Reality/The Body' thus helps us towards a better understanding of, and further develops, the enigmatic conclusion to 'Towards a Theory of Corporeality': that writing, in its two senses of *the physical act of writing* and *that which is written* (in particular, with regard to the

³³ Kanai Mieko, 'Kotoba/Genjitsu/Nikutai', in *Obasan No Disukūru* (Tokyo: Chikuma shobō, 1984) pp. 62-68.

latter, those texts which continue to be re-read within new contexts against which they are repeatedly re-understood, re-formulated, re-appropriated and, ultimately, re-written), is akin to corporeality in that such writing can also function as a site of consciousness, is interactive with its cultural surroundings, and hence is able to transform both itself and its readers through the act of what we might term *reading-as-writing*.

‘What,’ Kanai asks in the essay, ‘is the body?’ Her answer to this question begins by outlining how the body can be understood both as a limit, as an object which encases and imprisons consciousness, and as an entity which is able to transgress such physical limits. Kanai writes:

Whereas Mishima Yukio wrote, in a tone indistinguishable from despair and resignation, that the body was a *limit*, that consciousness was covered by our skin and unable to take even one step outside of the body, recently, it seems as though the thought of New Age sciences – that the boundaries of the body are not necessarily a limit – is popular. [...] Even so, the body is a peculiar thing.³⁴

These two glancing references to, respectively, Mishima and the then-fashionable offerings of the New Age scientists form, despite their brevity, the basis of the two models of accounting for mind/body/consciousness that Kanai’s essay wishes to critique.

Turning firstly to the former, Kanai’s mention of Mishima’s ‘despair and resignation’ recalls, in particular, the note that Mishima left on his desk the morning before his failed *coup d’état* resulted in his ritual suicide, which read,

³⁴ Ibid., p. 67.

'Human life is limited but I would like to live forever'.³⁵ This note and his consequent act of ritual suicide suggest, as Kanai intimates above, that Mishima never ultimately escaped his fundamental belief in the dualism of body and consciousness, and that he aligned the self with the latter rather than the former – hoping somehow to transcend the body after death. However, it is arguable that his beliefs are slightly more nuanced than Kanai's brief allusion in her essay would have us believe. His 1968 long essay, 'Taiyō to tetsu' ('Sun and Steel'), for instance, published two years before his attempted *coup d'état* and ritual suicide (and often read as an explanation of the philosophical values which led to his actions that day) problematises this understanding.³⁶ Mishima relates how literary, rather than physical pursuits preoccupied him as a child; how his primary understanding of his identity was developed through words rather than the body; and how his appreciation of the body and consequent cultivation of his own physique came subsequently. He writes:

When I examine closely my early childhood, I realise that my memory of words reaches back far farther than my memory of the flesh. In the average person, I imagine, the body precedes language. In my case words came first of all; then – belatedly, with every appearance of extreme reluctance, and already clothed in concepts – came the flesh. It was already, as goes without saying, sadly wasted by words.³⁷

First, it is important to establish that, although Mishima here is describing the relationship between *language* (and not the *consciousness*) and the body, the

³⁵ Damian Flanagan, *Yukio Mishima, Critical Lives* (London: Reaktion Books, 2014) p. 236.

³⁶ Yukio Mishima, *Taiyō to tetsu* (Tokyo: Kodansha, 1968); translated as: Yukio Mishima, *Sun and Steel*. trans. John Bester (Tokyo: Kodansha International Ltd, 1970).

³⁷ Mishima, *Sun and Steel*. p. 8.

text makes it evident that the acquisition of language cultivates an aspect of selfhood which is distinct and separated from the body (and therefore implies that the self resides somewhere *other* than the body in, for instance, an abstract consciousness). That this is a fundamental premise of the essay is later confirmed when he writes:

Words are a medium that reduces reality to abstraction for transmission to our reason, and in their power to corrode reality inevitably lurks the danger that the words themselves will be corroded too. It might be more appropriate, in fact, to liken their action to that of excess stomach fluids that digest and gradually eat away the stomach itself.³⁸

This passage posits that reality needs to be converted into an abstract code in order for us to be able to 'reason' (which presumably here entails the ability to conceptualise, imagine, or mentally recreate external reality); hence it supposes that our ability to reason is somehow formed through an abstract consciousness, all the while removed from, and independent of, the material reality of the body. Furthermore, Mishima here contends that, through the conversion of reality into words, or the abstract code in which our minds operate, reality is somehow condensed, elided, reduced, or 'corroded'.³⁹ In other words, we are asked to consider that our textual and conceptual figurings of the body are nothing more than attempts to translate material reality into an intangible abstraction; and, moreover, that words and the abstract consciousness to which they are directed are deficient in their ability to capture the original: they can *allude*, but never *describe*. Mishima's essay thus not only depicts a selfhood divided between the physical and the abstract, but also

³⁸ Ibid., p. 9.

³⁹ Ibid., p. 9.

perceives these two categories, as Kanai's essay points out, as working against each other, the one limiting, or smothering, the other. However, in contrast to the assertion that Kanai's essay makes – that Mishima believed the body was a *limit* – here Mishima writes that concepts and words 'clothed' his body with their meanings, and hence implies that such concepts and words conceal and restrict the body, 'wasting' it by stripping it of its own power and agency.⁴⁰ Indeed, although Mishima never departs from conceiving mind and body as entities that diametrically oppose one another, Mishima's essay argues that, among other things, through bodybuilding, he came to realise a different, physical identity, which was also bound to a 'spirit' of its own which is beyond both the body and the mind.

Even if one might wish to claim that Mishima's account of the self in 'Sun and Steel' is more subtle than the straightforward argument attributed to him by Kanai, it nevertheless remains that his understanding of the relationship between consciousness, language and the body contradicts that advanced in Kanai's earlier essay, and is used as an example of a negative model of being in the latter. In 'Towards a Theory of Corporeality', everything – including language and consciousness – is considered as arising from the body; whereas in 'Text/Reality/The Body', Mishima's inscription of the dualism of mind and body is used as a metaphor for texts which are unsuccessful in creating active and engaged readerships. Kanai writes:

Among all our various discourses, including those which are not necessarily popular, there are texts that are unable to take even one step outside of their lost internal worlds, and which refer, perhaps, to a fantastical 'I' or 'us', and I suppose that they must

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 9.

have an incorporeal body, which doesn't belong to the body, and which lies outside of the body like a wreckage of used-up words that age in written and spoken years.⁴¹

In this passage, Kanai makes an alignment between Mishima's inscription of *consciousness* as an abstract entity which is discrete from, and yet imprisoned by, the physical realm of the body, and *texts* that confront the reader with a set of discourses which are divorced from the material reality of the reading experience itself: those texts deemed classic works of literature, for instance, whose cultural presence, role and meaning are so well-established that they actually have no need of a reader to guarantee such a presence, such a role, such a meaning; this is why these 'incorporeal' texts perhaps refer to a 'fantastical "I" or "us"', readers who are present in the text, as it were, in name only.⁴²

Kanai's essay next evokes a second concept of body and consciousness, which, she claims is expounded by New Age science, in which 'the boundaries of the body are not necessarily a limit'.⁴³ She then deploys this concept as a metaphor for the way in which certain other texts, which she terms 'corporeal texts', are able to overcome the limitations faced by 'incorporeal texts', and, it is intimated, continue to resonate for their readers. Although the essay neither provides the reader with specific examples of 'incorporeal' or 'corporeal' texts, nor lists nor details their distinguishing features, Kanai's two metaphors for

⁴¹ Kanai, 'Kotoba/genjitsu/nikutai', p. 67-68.

⁴² Ibid., p.67.

⁴³ Ibid., p.67.

text can, nevertheless be taken as a commentary which sets out to critique conventional understandings of reading and writing.

Before we attempt to ascertain more clearly what Kanai's division of texts as being either corporeal or incorporeal actually achieves, it is first necessary to revisit and contextualise her statement (quoted above) that 'recently, it seems as though the thought of New Age sciences – that the boundaries of the body are not necessarily a limit – is popular.'⁴⁴ Specifically, we need to consider how, for the New Age sciences, the body can be understood to exceed the limitations of its own materiality.

The term 'New Age science' is arguably too homogenising, as it has been used to describe a vast range of theories and discourses, some of which are more rigorously 'scientific' than others. However, around the time of Kanai's writing, various respected members of the scientific community in the United States were producing articles and books that drew parallels between advanced new theories in physics or neuroscience and (particularly eastern) mystical accounts of the universe. These books, as Kanai notes, became extremely popular (not only in Japan but worldwide). They include, notably, biologist Humberto R. Maturana's 'Biology of Cognition' (1970), neuroscientist Karl H Pribram's *Languages of the Brain: Experimental Paradoxes and Principles in Neuropsychology* (1971), physicist Fritjof Capra's *The Tao of Physics* (1975),

⁴⁴ Ibid., p 67.

and physicist David Bohm's *Wholeness and the Implicate Order* (1980).⁴⁵ Collectively, these texts offered a profound challenge to conventional scientific and philosophical models, such as Newtonian physics and Cartesian dualism.⁴⁶ For example, with specific regard to the collapse of any mind/body distinction or categorisation, Fritjof Capra (writing retrospectively in 1996) notes how, according to the 'Santiago theory' of Maturana and biologist Francisco Varela, cognition is defined as a process, and one which is common to all organic life:

According to the Santiago theory, the brain is not necessary for the mind to exist. A bacterium, or a plant, has no brain but has a mind. The simplest organisms are capable of perception and thus of cognition. They do not see, but they nevertheless perceive changes in their environment – differences between light and shadow, hot and cold, higher and lower concentrations of some chemical, etc. [...] The new concept of cognition, the process of knowing, is thus much broader than that of thinking. It involves perception, emotion, and action – the entire process of life. In the human realm cognition also includes language, conceptual thinking and all the other attributes of human consciousness. [...] The Santiago theory provides, in my view, the first coherent

⁴⁵ The full references for these works and their translations into Japanese are: David Bohm, *Wholeness and the Implicate Order* (London: Routledge, 1980) (translated as: David Bohm, *Zentaisei to naizo chitsujo*. trans. Sano Masahiro, Inoue Tadashi, Itō Shakō [Tokyo: Seidosha, 1986]); Fritjof Capra, *The Tao of Physics* (Berkeley, California: Shambhala Publications, 1975) (translated as: *Taoshizengaku*. trans. Tanaka Mitsuhiko, Yoshifuku Shinichi, Shimada Hiromi and Nakayama Naoko [Tokyo: Kōsakusha, 1980]); Humberto R. Maturana, 'Biology of Cognition', in *Biological Computer Laboratory Research Report* (Illinois: University of Illinois, 1970) (later reprinted in *Autopoiesis and Cognition: The Realization of the Living* [Dordrecht: D. Reidel Publishing Co., 1980] pp. 5-58); and Karl Pribram, *Languages of the Brain: Experimental Paradoxes and Principles in Neuropsychology* (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1971) (translated as: *Nō no gengo: Jikken jō no paradokkusu to shinkei shinrigaku no genri* [Tokyo: Seishinshobō, 1978]).

⁴⁶ The main contention behind Maturana's 'Biology of Cognition', namely that cognition is a biological process, is summarised by Capra's outline of the Santiago Theory below; Pribram's *Language of the Brain* sets out how the brain processes information through storage networks which are spread across the whole brain; Capra's *Tao of Physics* (very controversially) seeks to demonstrate how modern physics offers a world view which correlates to the mystical visions of Buddha and Krishna; and Bohm's *Wholeness and the Implicate Order* sets out how recent findings in quantum physics challenge conventional western conceptions of self as separate, independent from, and objective of, the surrounding reality.

scientific framework that really overcomes the Cartesian split. Mind and matter no longer appear to belong to two separate categories but are seen as representing merely different aspects, or dimensions, of the same phenomenon of life.⁴⁷

The claim that cognition, or knowing, is a physiological process recalls Kanai's assertion that "to physically know" is [...] the only way of knowing'. Taken together, they both subvert any implicit hierarchy which, through the alignment of the thinking subject with an abstract consciousness, privileges intellect, while either vilifying or fetishising the physical acts of the body-as-an-object. Of course, the challenge to the mind/body binary opposition fundamental to Cartesian dualism has not only come from the New Age scientists of the 1970s. Feminist theory has also sought to question the apparent self-evidence of the opposition, in order to highlight and interrogate the *societal* alignment of the male with the *mind* and the female (as child bearer, or sexual object, for instance) with the *body*. (As we saw in Chapter One, Japanese female writers such as Takahashi Takako, Kurahashi Yumiko and Tsushima Yūko actively made such alignment themselves.) Indeed, many of these feminist texts have focussed specifically on reconfiguring the body in order to demonstrate how it can transgress the limitations that Cartesian dualism imposes.⁴⁸ It is through a consideration of this feminist challenge to

⁴⁷ Fritjof Capra, *The Web of Life: A New Synthesis of Mind and Matter* (London: Harper Collins, 1996). p. 170.

⁴⁸ Feminist publications that critique classical scientific discourse and methodology include: Sandra Harding, *The Science Question in Feminism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987); Nancy Tuana (Ed.) *Feminism and Science* (Indiana University Press, 1989); Evelyn Fox; Longino Keller, Helen E ed. *Oxford Readings in Feminism: Feminism and Science* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996); Angela N H Creager, *Feminism in Twentieth-Century Science, Technology and Medicine* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2001).

the mind/body hierarchy that we can inch closer to a clearer understanding of Kanai's 'corporeal' and 'incorporeal' text and of the radical potential contained in the former.

Elizabeth Grosz, in her book, *Volatile Bodies*, describes various ways in which the body can be understood to exceed its supposed materiality (recalling, and echoing incidentally, Kanai's phrase 'the body is a peculiar thing'):

The body is a most peculiar 'thing,' for it is never quite reducible to being merely a thing; nor does it ever quite manage to rise above the status of thing. Thus it is both a thing and a nonthing, an object, but an object which somehow contains or coexists with an interiority, an object able to take itself and others as subjects, a unique kind of object not reducible to other objects. Human bodies, indeed all animate bodies, stretch and extend the notion of physicality that dominates the physical sciences, for animate bodies are objects necessarily different from other objects; they are materialities that are uncontainable in physicalist terms alone. If bodies are objects or things, they are like no others, for they are the centers of perspective, insight, reflection, desire, agency. They require quite different intellectual models than those that have been used thus far to represent and understand them. I am not suggesting that medical, biological, even chemical analyses of the body are 'wrong' or 'inappropriate'; my claim is the simpler one that the guiding assumptions and prevailing methods used by these disciplines (indeed, by any disciplines) have tangible effects on the bodies studied. Bodies are not inert; they function interactively and productively. They act and react. They generate what is new, surprising, unpredictable.⁴⁹

The first thing to note in Grosz's text is that her definition of the body (a thing and a nonthing) is, like Kanai's model of the body which New Age Science describes, also predicated upon the notion that it is conceptually indivisible from consciousness: it is not an object which somehow contains or coexists

⁴⁹ Grosz, E. (1994) *Volatile Bodies: Towards a Corporeal Feminism*. Indiana: Indiana University Press. p. xi.

with an intellect. It is not our *minds* which are ‘centers of perspective, insight, reflection, desire, agency’, but our *bodies*; hence it is the body, and not a mind that is separate from the body, which is ‘able to take itself and others as subjects’.⁵⁰ The second thing to note is that Grosz’s bodies are also situated within an interactive context of social, cultural and scientific practices, all of which are deemed to ‘have tangible effects’ on them which, she intimates, go unacknowledged.⁵¹ Different observers, as it were, change the nature of the thing observed. Thus Grosz’s bodies can be said to be configured (at least, in part) through the discourses and texts that surround them.

Very simply then, it is this understanding – that the body is a *conduit of consciousness which operates within a wider matrix of bodies and texts* – which enables us to view how the body, through its interface with the universe around it, constantly exceeds its material boundaries by interacting with other bodies, responding to information and texts, and assimilating and reshaping itself to its environment and those around it, thereby ‘generat[ing] what is new, surprising, unpredictable.’ It is precisely *this* understanding of the body and its relationship to other bodies, texts, and the universe at large, which, I contend, is at work in Kanai’s description of the corporeal text. Kanai writes:

[I]f we are to suppose that the thing which we call the body does not necessarily belong to a consciousness which functions within a physiological limit, surely texts too do not necessarily belong to the specific body of the writer (lit. the solid body of the writer: *kaiteru mono no kotai toshite no nikutai*). Of course, we are not speaking of typical texts (and by typical texts I here refer not only to the weekly magazines and newspapers, but also to poems and novels) that are weakened and incorporeal. Amongst all our

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. xi

⁵¹ Ibid.

various discourses, even those which are not necessarily 'popular', there are texts that are unable to take even one step outside of a lost internal world, that pertain, perhaps, to a fantastical 'I' or 'us', and I suppose they must have an incorporeal corporeality, which lies outside of the body like a wreckage of used up words that age in written and spoken years.

Corporeal texts, by which term I do not mean their written contents, but texts that are incessantly turned towards the 'exteriority' of texts, that quietly slip through the limits (which so many people point out: *the limits of words*) are faced towards the 'exteriority' of that which is written and read, as a complete corporeal experience.

Corporeal texts are completely different from texts that create sexual or erotic images (which rather than 'corporeal', should be called 'stereotypically physiological'), rather, I wish to assert that texts themselves have a body, and it is particularly texts that relentlessly attempt to overcome their own body that are very corporeal in nature.⁵²

In Kanai's metaphor, the writer, reader, and external texts are elided together, are not distinguished from each other. However, they reveal themselves by constituting the limits of the corporeal text. The act of 'slip[ping] through the limits' must involve an interaction of the text, namely its being re-read and rewritten.⁵³ By being re-read and re-written by different generations, cultures, and in different contexts, the corporeal text takes on new meanings, exceeding the boundaries of its initial denotations and connotations. The reader, writer and external texts in their plurality thus give the text its own 'exteriority'.⁵⁴ That the corporeal text is 'turned towards the "exteriority" of texts', suggests that Kanai's active physiological textual bodies turn towards the reader, writer

⁵² Kanai, pp. 67-68 (original emphasis).

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 68.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

and external texts, that they invite comparison, criticism and re-writing.⁵⁵ As the limits of the corporeal text continue to be exceeded with each re-reading and re-writing, that which once was 'exterior' keeps shifting. And therefore the corporeal text must twist again to encompass new boundaries, to facilitate new ways in which it is read and written, packaged and conceived, to locate new meanings for itself, to rewrite itself. This process results in 'texts that might be misshapen almost beyond reason'; or, as Grosz describes the interactive physiological body, '[t]hey generate what is new, surprising, unpredictable'.⁵⁶ Kanai's corporeal text and Grosz's physiological body are therefore similar in the way in which their relentless interactivity with other bodies, whether textual or physiological, enables them to overcome their status as an object, provides them with agency, and facilitates the creation of that which is original and unique.

By now, it should be apparent that Kanai's conceptions of the incorporeal and corporeal text might be fruitfully considered in conjunction with the literary-theoretical terms that they most resemble: Barthes' notion of the 'readerly' and 'writerly' texts.⁵⁷ For Barthes, the readerly text is one that

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 68 and Grosz, *Volatile Bodies*, p. xi.

⁵⁷ Barthes writes about 'readerly' and 'writerly' texts in: Roland Barthes, *S/Z*. trans. Straus and Giroux Farrar, Inc. (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1990). The relationship between Kanai and Barthes has been commented upon by Atsuko Sakaki in Sakaki, A. (2009) *Breezes Through Rooms with Light: Kanai Mieko by Roland Barthes by Kanai Mieko*. PAJLS. Vol. 10. Purdue University Press. pp. 204-219, p. 216. Sakaki, stresses that the various similarities in their writings are not due to what Sakaki terms 'direct and vertical' influence, as is demonstrable by the fact that they include passages that Kanai had written, that were later closely echoed by Barthes, as well as the other way round, and when neither writer would have had access to the other's text in a language they could read. Instead, Sakaki concludes, such influence from one to the other is as much due to the natural empathy between the writers (who have broad but similar

'can be read but not written', is one that inhibits the reader's role in the production of meaning(s), is one that forever inscribes, defines and positions the reader as fundamentally *passive*.⁵⁸ He writes:

instead of gaining access to the magic of the signifier, to the pleasure of writing, [the reader] is left with no more than the poor freedom either to accept or reject the text: reading is nothing more than a *referendum*.⁵⁹

The readerly text is thus not a text that asks the reader to think, make connections, or interpret. For Barthes, these texts are overwhelmingly in the majority; and their proliferation is due in no small measure to the various cultural practices of the institutions of modern literature and its criticism. At the very outset of *S/Z* he explains that modern literary criticism, rather than celebrate any plurality of the text, is involved in attempting to reduce all narratives to the same, and he boldly declares slightly later that 'any readerly text [is called] a classic text'.⁶⁰

In contradistinction to this is the text Barthes calls 'writerly', which will ideally 'make the reader no longer a consumer, but a producer of the text'.⁶¹ The writerly text demands the reader's active engagement, offering many opportunities for the reader to intervene, to interpret and therefore to create

interests in textiles, photography, and film, to name but a few) as it is to Kanai's self-professed deep enjoyment of Barthes works. It is therefore 'horizontal', like 'breezes through rooms next to each other'.

⁵⁸ Barthes, *S/Z*, p. 4.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 4 (original emphasis).

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

their own 'text'.⁶² It is '*ourselves writing*' in a 'perpetual present', an embodied entity, a set of signifiers and signifieds whose meaning at any given moment is contingent on its readers/rewriters:⁶³

The more plural the text, the less it is written before I read it; I do not make it undergo a predicative operation, consequent upon its being, an operation known as reading, and I is not an innocent subject, anterior to the text, one which will subsequently deal with the text as it would an object to dismantle or a site to occupy. This 'I' which approaches the text is already itself a plurality of other texts, of codes which are infinite or, more precisely, lost (whose origin is lost).⁶⁴

In this excerpt, Barthes draws a parallel between *the plural text*, which is a composite of many other texts, and which therefore cannot ever be considered 'complete', offering as it does multiple interpretive possibilities, and *the reader* who is also a 'plurality of other texts', whose identity can never be fixed, predicted or determined in advance *by* the text, and to whom, therefore, there can never be ascribed any definite, locatable *origin*.⁶⁵ Thus, unlike Kanai, rather than describing text as *embodied* or as *corporeal*, he describes the human subject as *encoded by* and within an infinity of codes.⁶⁶

⁶² Ibid., p. 5.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 10.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ It is important to stress that, by 'code', Barthes does not mean a finite and ultimately closed set of interpretive parameters that a more conventional use of the term might imply: '[W]e use Code here not in the sense of a list, a paradigm that must be reconstituted. The code is a perspective of quotations, a mirage of structures; we know only its departures and returns; ... they are so many fragments of something that has always been *already* read, seen, done, experienced; the code is the wake of that *already*.' (Barthes, *S/Z* p. 20.)

Both Kanai and Barthes, then, posit the existence of two kinds of text: one which is bound by convention, which does not easily produce plural meanings, that conforms to and relies upon stereotypical interpretive practices and conventions; and one which transcends or exceeds such interpretive boundaries, forcing its readers to interact with it, and which cannot be reduced to a singular signification. Returning to Kanai, and her inscription of the former kind of text as being *incorporeal*, we should note that, in claiming that such texts 'lie outside of the body' she also indicates that they cannot engage with, or transform, collective or individual textual and physiological identities.⁶⁷ Such texts (like Barthes' readerly texts), Kanai intimates, are culturally dominant because of the sheer fact of their ubiquity: they are the writings which are popular because they are populist; they include the specious discourse of the Japanese literati; news media stereotypes, and the clichés of commercial copy. Incorporeal and readerly texts are thus aligned through being characterised by their *passivity*. Conversely, the corporeal text, the interactive and productive text, is configured by Kanai as one which is constantly exercising and testing its own physical suppleness, turning around on itself, and continually evolving beyond its own limits by sensing and incorporating what lies beyond it.

However, there is a difference between these two conceptions of the writerly/corporeal text, a difference due in part to the semantic possibilities afforded by the Japanese language itself: as Japanese noun formations denote both the singular and the plural, in writing of a 'corporeal text' (*nikutaiteki na kotoba*), Kanai is able to signify a variety of meanings simultaneously. A given

⁶⁷ Kanai, 'Text/Reality/The Body,' p. 68.

noun often stands not only for a thing and that thing in its plural form, but also for the constituent parts *of* that thing: for instance, the term *kotoba*, which has been translated in this chapter as ‘text’, but which also means ‘word’, might signify a whole text, the individual components of that text, plus that text as a *plural*: a text/a word/texts/words. Similarly, *nikutai* (‘body’) refers not just to the body singular and bodies plural, but also to its fundamental constituent, ‘flesh’. The term *nikutaiteki na kotoba* (corporeal text) thus makes use of the composite nature of language in general, its ability to interconnect concepts, to form whole conceptual structures which themselves interconnect with larger and smaller structures, simultaneously growing outward or contracting to its smallest semantic constituent part. Indeed, one might argue, as the French terms for text (*texte*) and subject (*sujet*) do not imply their construction from multiple parts, Barthes has to point out their fractured, plural, compositional nature whereas, for Kanai, such an implication is already present in the terms that she chooses.

This chapter commenced by arguing that the corporeal text, challenging as it does the conceptual discreteness of the categories text, body and mind, also problematises conventional practices of reading and writing: the creation of a corporeal text is, to reiterate, a deliberate act that is designed to transform the reader from passive recipient to active participant in the creation of literary meaning. What, then might such a corporeal text actually look like? How might we begin to enumerate the textual strategies that, firstly, prevent a slide into mere passive acceptance of a given text, and then, secondly, work to produce and facilitate the reader’s participatory function in the creative process? After

all, if we return to Barthes' *S/Z* for a moment, we find that the writerly text is a difficult beast to track down:

There may be nothing to say about writerly texts. First of all, where can we find them? Certainly not in reading (or at least very rarely: by accident, fleetingly, obliquely in certain limit-works): the writerly text is not a thing, we would have a hard time finding it in a bookstore.⁶⁸

To try to account for the writerly text as a tangible, physical commodity is to already have misunderstood it; to have reconfigured it, then re-installed it back within the conventional sociocultural frameworks of literary production, dissemination and reception; to have re-situated it back into a world of authorial world-views, literary reputations, bookshops, best-seller lists and professional critical evaluations. The writerly text, however, evades such restrictive, culturally-determined interpretive and distributive practices, existing only for those moments when it is brought into existence by the act of reading itself; it 'is a perpetual present..., it is *ourselves writing*.'⁶⁹ It is in this latter insistence that Barthes comes closest to Kanai's conception, not only of the corporeal text, but of the eternally-*present* body-self that was discussed at the beginning of the chapter; and, as we shall see below, one of the challenges that the corporeal text throws down to conventional fictive reading and writing practices is a challenge to the conception of *temporality* upon which so much fiction is epistemologically dependent – the *beginning*, *middle* and *end* that characterise conventional, linear narratives.

⁶⁸ Barthes, *S/Z*, p. 5.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

However, whereas Barthes' writerly text exists predominantly within the theoretical realm, Kanai's corporeal text, it can be argued, has a more demonstrable textual existence (consistent, perhaps, with Kanai's twin writing identities as both theorist and practitioner). In seeking to demonstrate as much, the remainder of the chapter focuses on her short story 'Kūki otoko no hanashi' ('The Story of the Inflated Man'), and tries to test how far one might fruitfully set her textual practice alongside her theoretical precepts. Of course, there is no *obligation* on the short story to conform to any such theories in the name of authorial cohesiveness, and the aim is not to judge the story in terms of its success or failure in that (very limited) respect. Nonetheless, the question still remains: what might a corporeal text actually *do*, in order to figure the reader as an active participant in the creative process?

'The Story of the Inflated Man': the Corporeal Text in Practice

'The Story of the Inflated Man' has yet to be published in an English translation; accordingly, my own translation is appended to this thesis. However, before we begin to discuss either, it should be noted that even the bibliographic details of the story demonstrate just how elusive and plural it is as a literary text, existing as it does in multiple versions which themselves reach out to the context of their respective publications in order to suggest its multiplicity of possible meanings. Specifically, the story first appeared in 1974 as part of a special, themed edition of the literary magazine *Shingeki*, entitled *Sākasu tokushū* (Circus Special).⁷⁰ This edition featured a variety of disparate texts, all taking

⁷⁰ Kanai Mieko, 'Kūki otoko no hanashi', *Shingeki*, 21 (1974), 138-44.

as their respective starting points the idea of the Circus. As well as Kanai's story, the edition included discussions with ringmasters about the contemporary significance of the circus; a head-to-head discussion between the avant garde dramatists Terayama Shūji and Suzuki Chūshi on time and space in the Circus; and essays by Terayama and film director Akune Isao.⁷¹ The story also appears, in a different form, which has become the more widely disseminated and better known of the two, in Kanai's short story collection, *Akashia kishidan* (The Knights of Akashia, 1976).⁷² Certainly, this is the version referred to in the only piece of sustained criticism of the story, by Suga Hidemi, who writes an introduction to Kanai in *Showa bungaku zenshū* (*A Complete Collection of Showa Literature*) and whose comments on the story display no apparent awareness that the *Shingeki* text – and context – exists. The difference between the two is comparatively straightforward: in the *Shingeki* text, the story has an unnamed framing narrator who briefly introduces and concludes the story. (In my appended translation, the framing device of the *Shingeki* text appears in bold.) The particular interpretive challenges thrown up by the *Shingeki* frame narrative are discussed below. For the moment, suffice it to say that the mere fact of these two different versions

⁷¹The articles referred to are Ozawa Shōichi, Shibuya Gasen, and Yamagami Shigeo, 'Sākasuteki kokoro (Sākasu tokushū)', *Shingeki*, 21 (1974), 100-17; *Shingeki*'s serial feature: Terayama Shūji and Suzuki Chūshi, 'Jikan to kūkan 4', *Shingeki*, 21 (1974), 36-51; Terayama Shūji, 'Sākasu no seijigaku: Issunbōshi kara savari made (Sākasu tokushū)', *Shingeki*, 21 (1974), 82-89; and Akune Isao, 'Sākasu no dentōgei (Sākasu tokushū)', *Shingeki*, 21 (1974), 90-99.

⁷² The version of 'Kūki otoko no hanashi' printed in *Akashia kishidan* [The Knights of Akashia] (Tokyo: Shinchōsha, 1976) was subsequently reprinted in: *Shōwa bungaku zenshū 31* (Tokyo: Shōgakukan, 1988); Yoshimura Akira; Kanai Mieko; Hata Kōhei, ed. *Chikuma gendai bungaku taikai*. Vol. 93 (Tokyo: Chikuma shobō, 1978); *Kanai Mieko: Zentanpenshū* (Tokyo: Nihon bungeisha, 1992) pp. 144-52; and *Ai no seikatsu/ Mori no merujīnu* [*Love Life/Melusine of the Forest*] (Tokyo: Kodansha, 1997) pp. 207-216.

of the story, and of the two necessarily different readings they engender, can be seen to initiate the process whereby any 'fixedness' of interpretation of the story(ies) begins to slide.

As noted above, the only piece of published criticism which discusses 'The Story of the Inflated Man' at any length is by Suga Hidemi, in which, in the context of a discussion about Kanai's literary output as a whole, he argues that, as a self-reflexive piece of 'writing about writing' (*kakukoto ni tsuite kaku*), the story doubles as a piece of literary criticism on the nature of writing itself, with such self-reflexivity achieved through a repeated layering of metaphor and symbolism throughout the story:

Let us simply invalidate the naïve comment that 'The Story of the Inflated Man' (1974) is a short *conte*: it is a piece of critical fiction. In this work, '*watashi*', our narrator, is someone who, because of the 'Inflated Man of the Circus', has become a painter. If we consider 'painter' to be a metaphor for 'writer', the typical structure of a piece of metafiction becomes instantly discernible. This is, moreover, because the Inflated Man is himself a metaphor for 'writing'. His existence is predicated on consumption which does not result in fecundity: as we are informed by the Inflated Man, '[f]ood is something that becomes blood and flesh in normal bodies but in my case it becomes like a kind of air, a hollow that has no substance, but that continues to expand'. The reason why this constitutes a metaphor for 'writing' is to do with the fact that this piece of short fiction is also structured like the Inflated Man. [...] The painting that *watashi* draws of the Inflated Man depicts this structure as follows: 'If the Inflated Man's innards were like a hollow cave, I would be able to fit inside him, all curled up'.⁷³

Any metafictional text forces the reader to question the relationship between fiction and reality, while bringing the postmodern sensibility at work in all

⁷³ Suga Hidemi, 'Kanai Mieko: Hito to sakuhin' ['Kanai Mieko: People and Art'] in *Shōwa bungaku zenshū* (Tokyo: Shōgakukan, 1988) pp. 961-64, p. 964.

metafiction to the fore; namely, that claims to 'narrative truth' are subjective, contingent, and temporary. Hence, for Suga, in order for 'The Story of the Inflated Man' to fulfill the metafictional function he confers upon it, not only is it necessary for him to read the painter, *watashi*, as being the symbolic *writer of the story*, but also to read the Inflated Man as being, somehow, a metaphor for *the writer's story*, or, more plainly, for *writing itself*. However, in this specific instance – and while this chapter concurs with Suga that the story is a complex exercise in self-referentiality – his account of the story will ultimately be found to be unsatisfactory, because of the fundamentally problematic critical epistemological certitudes he relies on to underpin and validate his argument. For example, and most strikingly, the rather crude formulation that he deploys above, 'if-we-consider-x-to-be-y' is a weak foundation for *any* argument. Necessarily, if his analysis is to proceed untroubled, such a formulation has to avoid the very question that it raises: what happens if we *don't* consider (in this instance) 'painter' to be a metaphor for 'writer'? What happens to Suga's reading if we refuse to make the interpretive leap that he effectively coerces us into making with him? Put another (less combative) way, what, if anything, is there in the story that directs the reader to *necessarily* interpret the narrator's account as being a metaphorical one? Without any immediate textual support for his position, Suga's 'if-we-consider-x-to-be-y' argument starts to look suspiciously like the sort of critical injunction that characterises Barthes' readerly, and Kanai's incorporeal text: it presumes the reader's assent, and hence effectively prohibits interpretive difference. Any potential plurality of meaning is denied.

This is borne out by the rest of Suga's essay; and, ultimately, Suga is unwilling to shift from a retrogressive critical procedure which talks about Kanai, her writings and, indeed, literature generally, in the most conservative of terms.

Novels *cannot be written* unless there is a given narrator's tale. And readers can only read their tales as a story. Moreover, 'writing about writing' will not continue for eternity. However, I don't doubt for a minute Kanai Mieko's claim that writing exists like a dazzling accident in the flow of water (or words). Is it necessary to say once again that Kanai Mieko, who soaks her body in that miracle water (words), is a writer for whom we are eternally waiting? ⁷⁴

This succession of prescriptive, apparently common-sense statements reveals the extent to which Suga is uncomfortable with the challenges thrown up by Kanai's writings: he argues, 'Novels *cannot be written* unless there is a given narrator's tale,' a given narrator who acts as a coherent, unified and unifying bestower of meaning.⁷⁵ 'And readers can only read their tales as a story' because the conventions that govern the production of literary meaning are so strong and, it is implied, so *unchallengeable*, that 'readers can only' (literally) *do as they are told*.⁷⁶ 'Moreover, "writing about writing" will not continue for eternity.'⁷⁷ In other words, Suga reassures us, this self-reflexivity that he identifies is nothing more than a modish literary fashion that will, thankfully, pass, presumably taking its challenges with it. 'However, I don't ever doubt for a minute Kanai Mieko's claim that writing exists like a dazzling accident in the

⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 964.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

flow of water (or words).'⁷⁸ This statement requires a slightly more detailed gloss; but, in essence, Suga is referring to Kanai's essay 'Mizu kara "soto" e' ('From Water to "Surface"') in which she likens the urge to write as a physiological impulse akin to the rising of water, and tells of an occasion when her body 'came to feel as if it were awash with the flood of the word *reality* and the word *novel*' until she put pen to paper, and the writing overflowed.⁷⁹ Suga is able to seize on this image of literary activity as being an almost uncontrollable urge in order to validate his last point, which is that Kanai is an instance of that special person, an Author. 'It is necessary to say once again that Kanai Mieko, who soaks her body in that miracle water (words), is a writer for whom we should be eternally waiting.'⁸⁰ Suga's own words here, if not water, are certainly gushing; and in adapting Kanai's own metaphor, he couldn't demonstrate more clearly, in this extravagantly-paid compliment to Kanai's literary *ability*, both his own view of her as a creator of literary works of great merit and the position of *obeisance* and respect he assumes 'we' should adopt in relation to them.

Suga's determination to locate, or, rather, install a unifying cohesive Authorial presence called 'Kanai Mieko' behind/above/before/around her writings neatly exemplifies the critical procedure famously outlined by Barthes in 'The Death of the Author':

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Mieko Kanai, 'Mizu kara "soto" e' [From Water to "Surface"] in *Kotoba to 'zure'* [*Words and Slippage*] (Tokyo: Chūōkōronsha, 1983) pp. 56-133, p. 59 (original emphasis).

⁸⁰ Suga, 'Kanai Mieko: Hito to sakuhin' p. 964.

To give a text an Author is to impose a limit on that text, to furnish it with a final signified, to close the writing. Such a conception suits criticism very well, the latter then allotting itself the important task of discovering the Author (or its hypostases: society, history, psyché, liberty) beneath the work: when the Author has been found, the text is 'explained' – victory to the critic.⁸¹

As Suga is determined, as Barthes might term it, to have his 'victory', he is compelled to ignore the conclusion that his own observations are leading him towards: namely, that the metafictional intertextuality that he discerns in 'The Story of the Inflated Man' is inescapably at odds with the interpretative closure implicit in his critical pronouncements. That is why, ultimately, he has to account for the story's intertextuality, not as an outward-directed textual strategy, a strategy that ensures that, as Barthes puts it, any textual 'unity' it may possess 'lies not in its origin but in its destination [the reader]'.⁸² Rather, in order to *contain* 'The Story of the Inflated Man', Suga has to reinscribe these Author-less textual happenings as being no more than stylistic *characteristics* of an Author called 'Kanai Mieko'. If, as Barthes writes, criticism 'allot[s] itself the important task of discovering the Author (or its hypostases: society, history, psyché, liberty)', then the hypostasis that Suga has discovered is one called 'intertextuality'.⁸³ In other words, any plurality of meaning or signification becomes, for Suga, neither a challenge to, nor an interrogation of, conventional reading and writing practices; instead the plurality of meaning itself becomes merely emblematic of Kanai's writing style. It then follows that the critic or

⁸¹ Roland Barthes, 'The Death of the Author', in *Image, Music, Text* (London: Fontana, 1977) p. 147.

⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 148.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 147.

reader's recognition of the fact of intertextuality becomes the final destination of all critical enquiry. That recognition becomes the thing beyond which criticism cannot proceed; it is the conceptual end of interpretation that is the sure sign of the critic's 'victory'.⁸⁴

Suga's criticism of 'The Story of the Inflated Man', however problematical we may find it, is nonetheless useful precisely because it highlights and demonstrates how, so often, the critical procedure of investigating a given text becomes an exercise in *accounting* for that text. Nevertheless, it is still my contention that, provided one acknowledges the inevitable *provisional* nature of one's critical endeavours, one can still fruitfully examine Kanai's story to ascertain if it in fact resists the interpretive closure that Suga seeks to impose upon it.

Barthes says, of 'the ideal text',

that the networks are many and interact, without any one of them being able to surpass the rest; this text is a galaxy of signifiers, not a structure of signifieds; it has no beginning; it is reversible; we gain access to it by several entrances, none of which can be authoritatively declared to be the main one; the codes it mobilizes extend *as far as the eye can reach*, they are indeterminable (meaning here is never subject to a principle of determination, unless by throwing dice); the systems of meaning can take over this absolutely plural text, but their number is never closed, based as it is on the infinity of language.⁸⁵

If Barthes' text is 'ideal', of course, then by definition it cannot exist. Nonetheless, the above passage indicates that it is the sheer proliferation of conflicting and competing textual signifiers that inevitably presents the text as

⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 147.

⁸⁵ Barthes, *S/Z*, pp. 5-6 (original emphasis).

a site wherein meanings are constantly shifting and tested. What the remainder of this chapter aims to do, therefore, is to enumerate – without, it is to be hoped, privileging one over another – some of the various practices and features that keep ‘The Story of the Inflated Man’ perpetually enigmatic and resistant to interpretive closure.

Returning to the *Shingeki* edition, then, already we see Kanai’s story being contextualised and, as it were, *invaded* by the plurality of texts that surround it. This is not merely to state the banal (but no less relevant) bibliographic fact that Kanai’s story originally found itself in the company of other pieces of writing; rather, the ‘invasion’ by these other texts is actually manifest in the textual fabric of the story itself. The main body of the narrative begins:

Although I didn’t completely believe the story of the circus, the kidnapers, and the vinegar that the kidnapped children were forced to drink to make their bodies’ bones supple, I thought there was no way of doubting that, a long time ago, this kind of thing really happened. Stories like this used to hide, coolly and quietly in the ancestral ashes, in the middle of a darkened room, and sometimes leak out in a faint, rasping voice. For me, the story was too equivocal to know exactly how far in the past ‘a long time ago’ was supposed to refer; I had completely no idea.⁸⁶

The most pertinent question we might ask at the outset of this narrative account is precisely the question Barthes asked of the excerpt from Balzac’s ‘Sarrasine’ at the beginning of ‘The Death of the Author’: ‘Who is speaking thus?’⁸⁷ Barthes is talking about the interpretive difficulties thrown up by the

⁸⁶ Kanai Mieko, ‘Kūki otoko no hanashi’, in *Kanai Mieko: Zentanpenshū* (Tokyo: Nihon bungeisha, 1992) pp. 144-52, p. 144.

⁸⁷ Barthes, ‘The Death of the Author’, p. 147.

apparently author-less statements that constitute the classic nineteenth-century realist third-person narrative. However, with 'The Story of The Inflated Man', Barthes' question becomes pertinent because of the way the story foregrounds, at its very outset, the interpretive difficulties present with any fictional *first-person* narrative, in which any implied authorial voice is forever subsumed within, or obscured by, the narrator, so that the two are forever melded together, even as they forever strain to be discrete entities, locked in a constant state of tension. In this specific instance, any coherence of narratorial voice, which would allow the reader to regard the narrator not only as the *teller of*, but also as a *character within*, his own story, is compromised at its commencement by the fact that the text offers the possibility of two specific referents: the apparent 'real' (but fictional) world referred to by the story's main narrator, and the actual context of the story's inclusion within the *Shingeki* special edition. This might seem, on the face of it, an odd assertion to make. The simplicity of the two, short introductory sentences of the *Shingeki* framing device ('I was introduced to a painter who only painted pictures of caves and I listened to his story. The following is what he told me.') seem to define, in their simplicity, three straightforward and readily-understandable categories: author, anonymous frame narrator, and the main, secondary narrator ('the painter').⁸⁸ For no other reason, than the inscription of the main narrator as being male, the difference here between female author and male narrator would seem to be clearly marked; and not, as I state above, on the point of collapse. However, it is my contention that not only might we legitimately infer that, in the narrator's referencing 'the story of the circus', and

⁸⁸ Kanai Mieko, 'Kūki otoko no hanashi', in *Shingeki*, p. 138.

his having ‘no way of doubting that, a long time ago, this kind of thing really happened,’ he (as a fictional character) is referring to stories that were told to him in the (fictional) past of his (fictional) childhood; we might also infer that the narrator, or rather, the *author Kanai*, is directly referencing such stories as alluded to in the pages of the magazine itself.⁸⁹ This is because the narrator’s ‘story’ of the circus that no doubt ‘happened’ is mimicked in the round-table discussion of the three ringmasters, published in the same edition:

Ozawa: By the way, are we saying that ‘The World of the Circus’ is successful, and that the circus itself has overcome its bad reputation? – for people of my generation and older, when we were children [we thought that] the circus was an extremely bad place; if we didn’t listen to what was being said there would be the threat, ‘we’ll sell you to the circus’ – that kind of thing was in everyone’s heads – and in films or in novels, if someone did something bad they would immediately run away to the circus; circus people were always doing bad things, and to be on stage was thought to be extremely sad – I think those kinds of tragic stories were extremely prevalent, but now, in contrast, I get the feeling things are much better.

Yamagami: In Japan generally, the image of the circus is bad, buying and selling children and...

Shibuya: I think it never happened, not in our circus....

Ozawa: But let’s say it did happen, it isn’t just the circus, in all kinds of arenas that sort of thing must have happened in the past.

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The similarities between the excerpt from the story and the panel discussion are unmistakable; and set alongside one another, they cannot help but resonate with one another. One has to choose one’s language carefully here, of

⁸⁹ Kanai Mieko, ‘Kūki otoko no hanashi’, in *Kanai Mieko: Zentanpenshū*, p. 144.

⁹⁰ Ozawa Shōichi, Shibuya Gasen, and Yamagami Shigeo, ‘Sākasuteki kokoro (Sākasu tokushū)’, *Shingeki*, p. 101.

course: the formulation I use above, ‘the narrator’s “story” ... is mimicked in the round-table discussion’, has the unintentional effect of creating a hierarchical structure in which the voices of the discussion are subservient to the narrative voice of the story, precisely because the latter is deemed to be the anterior, precedent one. A different formulation might have the same effect: ‘the narrator’s “story” ... is *echoed by* the round-table discussion.’ Mindful of the need to avoid such privileging of one text over another, therefore, one should stress that the installation of such a hierarchy is due to a certain mode of reading, a mode which likes to think in terms of origins, consequences, influences and derivations, and which ultimately creates an Author who serves to underwrite all permissible interpretations, with the round-table discussion then being reconfigured as a ‘source’ of the Kanai story. As Barthes puts it: ‘The *explanation* of a work is always sought in the man or woman who produced it, as if it were always in the end, through the more or less transparent allegory of the fiction, the voice of a single person, the *author* ‘confiding’ in us.’⁹¹ Rather, however, through their being set beside one another in the magazine, the voices of the panel and the narrative voice of the story can be seen to operate in the way, as we have already quoted from *S/Z*, that Barthes’ ideal text does: ‘the networks are many and interact, without any one of them being able to surpass the rest.’⁹² This returns us to the question ‘Who is speaking thus?; and, by now, it will have become apparent, that the answer is far from straightforward: is it an implied authorial ‘I’ referring directly to the pages surrounding her in the magazine?; is it a fictional ‘I’ coincidentally talking in a similar vein to the

⁹¹ Barthes, ‘Death of the Author’, p.143.

⁹² Barthes, *S/Z*, p. 5.

three ringmasters?; is it a fictional 'I' deliberately shattering any illusion of fictive reality through the deployment of a deliberative metatextual allusion to the *Shingeki* framework of the story? Even if it is none of these, of course, the mere fact of the juxtaposition of the Kanai story with the accounts of the three ringmasters serves to liberate the text from a 'single "theological" meaning (the "message" of the Author-God)', reaffirming its status as 'a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash.'⁹³

Moreover, the question of who is speaking is complemented, and further problematised, by – as we have already seen – a different question: what is the referent? If we turn to the excerpt from 'The Story of the Inflated Man' quoted above, for instance, it becomes apparent that the immediate referent (the thing that allegedly happened to children at the circus) becomes conflated with its own narrative inscription (*the story* about the thing that allegedly happened to children at the circus). Such a conflation thus serves not only to render the (fictional) 'truth' alluded to more, as it were, inaccessible; it also has the concomitant effect of highlighting the *mode of* narration rather than the *thing being narrated*. This, then, is complicated further still by the fact that the narrative voice uses, to relate these prefatory remarks, *negative* verbal constructions, constructions that have the effect of complicating any simple, ostensible correspondence between word and (fictional) world necessary to the textual self-effacement that, in turn, is necessary to the realist illusion. Hence it is written: '[a]lthough I didn't completely believe...' (*zenmenteki ni shinyō shiteita wake de wa nakatta keredo*); and 'I had no way of doubting

⁹³ Barthes, 'Death of the Author', p. 146.

that...' (*utagaiyō no nai koto*).⁹⁴ As narrative statements, they both serve to distance the reader from the alleged remembered past that the narrator is alluding to, through their fundamental *provisionality*. They both serve, as qualifying statements, to cast doubt on the reliability of our narrator, even before we have any kind of coherent notion as to who our narrator 'is'. In other words, through their negative formulation, the above statements are not so conducive to being susceptible to that willing suspension of disbelief necessary to the illusion of literary realism. Instead, what becomes inevitably foregrounded is *the indistinctness of the narrator's memory*. (This foregrounding continues throughout the story, as the narrator continually qualifies his narrative with conventional expressions of recollective ambivalence: '[a]s far as I can remember' [*watashi no kioku shiteiru kagiri de wa*]; 'there is such a thing as the distant view of the tent about which my memory is inaccurate' [*tento no enkei toiu koto de aru ga, sore ni tsuite watashi no kioku wa fuseikaku de*]; 'as far as I can remember' [*oboeteitemo*].)⁹⁵ In this way, with the opening sentences of 'The Story of the Inflated Man', the reader is left primarily contemplating *the mode of narration itself*, rather than any successfully-realised fictional world.

If we then turn to our excerpt from the round-table discussion, we see that precisely the sort of referential difficulties encountered in the excerpt from the story obtain here (magnified by the sheer multiplicity of the voices on offer): just as it is in the story, the circus becomes a thing about which stories are told: it has 'a bad reputation'; stories abound in films, novels and 'in

⁹⁴ Kanai, 'Kūki otoko no hanashi', in: *Kanai Mieko: Zentanpenshū*, p. 144.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 145.

everyone's heads'; it is a place that generates 'tragic stories'.⁹⁶ It further correlates to the Kanai text, moreover, in the way that these very stories are themselves only ever *provisional* in terms of their truth or falsity: 'the image of the circus is bad'; 'I think it never happened'; 'let's say it did happen'; 'that sort of thing must have happened in the past'.⁹⁷ Taken together then, we can see that, for both Kanai's narrator and the ringmasters, the circus is not so much *a thing to be referred to*; rather, it operates as a site that reflects – or deflects – back to the reader *the possibility of generating meanings*. The circus is thus forever *present*, inasmuch as its configuration as a *thing represented* (it is never a thing; only ever a story *about*, an image *of*, that thing) means that it only exists when its never-ceasing multiplicity of meanings is generated by the reader. That such a generation necessarily bestows an atemporal existence on both narrative and thing-narrated is borne out by the last sentence of our excerpt: 'For me, the story was too equivocal to know exactly to how far in the past 'a long time ago' was supposed to refer; I had completely no idea.'⁹⁸ The circus only exists as 'stories about the circus', and such stories only exist at the moment of their generation by the narrator and (therefore) the reader:

text is made of multiple writings, drawn from many cultures and entering into mutual relations of dialogue, parody, contestation, but here is one place where this multiplicity is focused and that place is the reader, not, as was hitherto said, the author. The reader is the space on which all the quotations that make up a

⁹⁶ Ozawa Shōichi, Shibuya Gasen, and Yamagami Shigeo, 'The Heart of the Circus (Circus Special)', *Shingeki*, p. 101.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 101.

⁹⁸ Kanai, 'Kūki otoko no hanashi', in: *Kanai Mieko: Zentanpenshū*, p. 144.

writing are inscribed without any of them being lost; a text's unity lies not in its origin but in its destination.⁹⁹

The circus, then, becomes like Barthes' notional writing: its [conceptual] 'unity lies not in its origin but in its destination, and, in its endless cycle of narrative inscription and re-inscription, it cannot help but continually foreground both its own atemporality, and its own status as a fiction:

At the very least, I'm sure over half of it was a circus composed of stories that I had read, about fierce animals, acrobats, and trapeze artists. At the present moment, in the middle of a microcosmos that does not abide by the laws of time, this circus exists [...].¹⁰⁰

Not only, then, is a straightforward chronologically-determined narrative account impossible (because of the permanent possibility that any apparent memories of the circus the narrator might wish to relate are, in fact, constructions made from later narrative encounters with the cultural phenomenon *circus*); moreover, to *recall* the circus becomes, instead, to *re-read* the circus, hence its permanent existence 'in the middle of a microcosmos that does not abide by the laws of time.' The circus is perpetually in 'the present moment'.

One striking aspect of the narrative is its insistence on talking about the circus in terms of its *structure*; and, moreover, of the *indeterminability* of that structure:

At the circus, all the spectators turn their faces up to watch the trapeze in mid-air, and it would be great if I could just remember the shape of the tent's ceiling, but, somehow – to continue my fruitless rambling – my only impression was that it was high – and,

⁹⁹ Barthes, 'Death of the Author', p. 148.

¹⁰⁰ Kanai, 'Kūki otoko no hanashi', in: *Kanai Mieko: Zentanpenshū*, p. 146.

at the time the tents I knew were the small triangular-shaped camping tents – so from the beginning, I was under the impression that all tents were that shape; I don't think I even tried to consider what shape the circus tent was. ¹⁰¹

The elusive quality of the structure of the tent, plus the narrator's perspective (repeatedly enunciated through the story) of viewing from within, so that the very notion of 'structure' becomes co-terminous with that of the void it contains, surrounds and defines, together become another means by which the story continually challenges its own narrative procedures, and foregrounds its referential instability. Not only does 'The Story of the Inflated Man' (as we have seen) make a figurative association between 'circus' and 'story'; it also, through its repeated associations of 'structure' with 'void', makes a *pictographic* association. In other words, the story uses the symbolic representation of the term 'fiction' (*kyokō*) to signal its own status as a piece of fiction. The two kanji characters for *kyokō* are '虚構', the first of which (*kyo*) denotes 'emptiness', and the second of which (*kō*) denotes 'structure'; put together thus, as a compound noun, they gesture towards an understanding of 'fiction' as the *structuring* of that which is *non-existent* (or, if one prefers, *imaginary*). However, as we saw in both Chapters One and Two, for Japanese surrealist avant gardism (which operates as one of the contexts within which Kanai's early fictional writings can be situated), concepts such as *mu* ('nothing') or *fuzai* ('absence') have retained (or, rather, have been reinscribed in the postwar era with) a Buddhist aesthetic, in which existence, the universe, life itself, are simultaneously 'everything' and 'nothing'; 'presence' and 'absence'; 'emptiness' and 'repleteness'. Hence, in 'The Story of the Inflated Man', the reader is repeatedly presented with variations of

¹⁰¹ Ibid., p. 145.

this image: an empty space, a void, a cosmos, a cave (or, to use a term applied several times within the story itself, *kūdō* ['a hollow' or 'a cavern']) which, paradoxically, stands for the framework that surrounds it. After all, to make a balloon *balloon-shaped* – or, to put it another way, to ensure that the balloon *takes on the identity of a balloon* – that balloon has to be filled with air. Thereafter, as the balloon's existence is dependent upon that which it contains – even though it contains *nothing* – the paradox entails that it is precisely that nothing that acts as guarantor of the identity of that which surrounds it.

This paradox is one that is enacted for the reader throughout the story. We have already seen this in the way that the story inscribes the circus: stories about the circus are indivisible from the idea of the circus, which is indivisible from the idea of the circus tent, which is indivisible from the tent itself, which is indivisible from the void that fills the tent. Similarly, if we turn to the beginning of the painter's narrative, we are presented with a complex overlaying of the twin notions of fiction and emptiness. We are told that '[s]tories like this used to hide, coolly and quietly in the ancestral ashes, in the middle of a darkened room, and sometimes leak out in a faint, rasping voice.'¹⁰² In this sentence, fiction, as a concept, is referenced or alluded to thrice over: through its being the subject matter; through its being foregrounded as being subject to a 'literary' mode of inscription; and through its invocation of the idea of the empty structure. The literal subject of the sentence is 'stories', stories whose truth, as we have already been informed, can never be ascertained: in other words, 'fiction'. Furthermore, by inscribing these stories figuratively, or in a

¹⁰² Kanai, 'Kūki otoko no hanashi', in: *Kanai Mieko: Zentanpenshū*, p. 144.

'literary' manner (they are, metaphorically, able to 'hide', biding their time until they 'leak out' of the ashes in 'a faint rasping voice'), the mode of narration suggests that what is being said about these 'stories' is necessarily not *literally* true, hence fictional. Finally, the creation of the image of an empty structure (the darkened room) which contains another empty structure (the pot of ashes, with ashes here being synonymous with the simultaneous absence and presence that derives from representing 'death') inside of which is a multiplicity of stories (or, in other words, *fiction*, and therefore, symbolically, yet *more* empty structures) effects the pictographic representation of fiction, while insisting on the endlessness of that-which-is-fictional.

We are also presented with the image (or images) of the Inflated Man himself, inscribed through a number of similes and analogies drawn from the literary and artistic realms which (aside from reinforcing the text's status as being a constituent part of a surrounding intertext) also collapse the apparent opposites listed above:

I could only think that he was, beyond doubt, like a big ball, a big ball inside of which something mysterious was stuffed. What had been stuffed in him? I imagined a large cavern inside his body. Jonah's whale, or its pastiche, Pinocchio's whale, I thought. If the Inflated Man's innards were like a cavern, I would easily be able to fit inside, all curled up. Wasn't he made from that hull-like skeleton, a skeleton that had those dark cavern innards, a skeleton around which flesh and skin had been stuck. When I was twenty, I worked extremely hard to develop my technical skills and I drew a diagram of the inflated man's innards. Colouring it with watercolours and pencils, I drew a man whose curved bones formed a ball shape, and inside of this, I tried drawing myself curled up asleep.¹⁰³

¹⁰³ Ibid., p. 149-150.

In a straightforwardly representationalist account of the above, we might claim that our narrator meets the Inflated Man, thinks about him, and uses him to help form his own unique, artistic sensibility (a sensibility, we might note, informed by the painter's knowledge of scripture and contemporary culture: the biblical story of Jonah and the Whale; and of Monstro the sperm whale, in Disney's *Pinocchio*). Thereafter, once our painter has a fully formed conception of his subject, he is finally able (with time and hard work) to craft an image deriving from his encounter with the Inflated Man. This is a perfectly adequate account, of course; but it is one that, centring as it does on the *creator*, his *life* and his *encounters*, can be seen to affirm a rather conventional understanding of the artist in relation to his art. However, as we have already seen, the story disrupts and obscures the narrative patterns necessary to creating the linear, chronological narrative implied by the account above. Moreover, as the quotation above reveals, the text of 'The Story of the Inflated Man' repeatedly makes its frame of references textual and artistic ones, so that the reader's understanding is directed, not to 'the real world' but, primarily, to other texts and artefacts. Just as the 'empty structure' that is the Inflated Man is inside the empty structure of the circus, which is itself occupying 'a vacant plot'¹⁰⁴, so, too, in the story itself, the preponderance of the references offered to assist the reader to interpret the Inflated Man are textual or pictorial: Jonah, Pinocchio, Noah's Ark, the nameless proliferation of stories about the circus, and Rabelais's *Gargantua and Pantagruel*.

This proliferation of texts is even more apparent in the story as it appears in the *Shingeki* edition, of course, being surrounded as it is with, not

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., p. 145.

only a framing narrative, but also, as we have already discussed, a variety of other circus-themed texts and dialogues to which it cannot help but direct the reader's interpretive attention. We might also add that the whole set of referents to do with painting/writing/fiction/empty structures is rendered more immediately explicit in the *Shingeki* version. As we will recall, the frame narrative states: 'I was introduced to a painter who only painted pictures of caves and I listened to his story. The following is what he told me.'¹⁰⁵ By writing that the painter 'only painted pictures of caves', the narration starkly draws attention not only to the image of an 'empty structure', or 'void' itself, but to the fact that the image is, potentially, an important, mysterious 'trope' or 'symbol' within the painter's story for the reader to solve, even though any solution is effectively withheld, thus simultaneously inviting interpretation while denying the possibility of interpretive closure. As Kanai writes of the corporeal text, the story will therefore be perpetually 'turn[ing] towards the 'exteriority' of [itself]' in an 'attempt to overcome [its] own body'.¹⁰⁶

The more common version of the story, without the frame narrative, might not invite so immediately and pointedly the interpretation of the image of the 'caves' which habitually form the painter's subject matter (and, indeed, this latter 'fact' is never explicitly stated elsewhere in the story, so it is an aspect of the narrative lost to readers of the frameless version); nevertheless the image, and the concepts of 'fiction', 'emptiness' and 'multiplicity', which, as discussed above, are tied to, or set alongside, this image, feature so repeatedly

¹⁰⁵ Kanai, 'Kūki otoko no hanashi', *Shingeki*, p. 144.

¹⁰⁶ Kanai, 'Kotoba/genjitsu/nikutai', p. 68.

throughout the narrative that my central contention about the proliferation of texts and images directing the reader to a multiplicity of potential interpretations still holds. Moreover, this latter version offers its own ambiguities; by losing the framing narrator, the text renders the main narrator a more elusive textual presence, being nameless and genderless. The absence of these narrative determiners, as well as the lack of spatial and temporal indicators, helps yet again to reinforce and highlight, primarily, the textuality of the story.

As we have already seen, the story gestures towards multiple contexts in order to defer to the reader the process of generating its potential meanings, and the process whereby these gestures are made would seem to be an *associative* one. Words, ideas, images: all are set alongside one another, resonating and producing their possible meanings when the reader brings them to bear on each other, or forms associations between them. In other words, rather than claim, say, that the Inflated Man is a *metaphor* for the circus (or, for that matter, that the circus is a metaphor for the Inflated Man), or that (as Suga would have it) *painting* is a metaphor for *writing* – claims which, in the finality of their pronouncements, are actually manifestations of a critical desire to account for, explain and therefore perform an act of interpretive closure upon the story – we might, instead, recognise that the text is asking for (or, at least, presenting the possibility for) the reader to form such associations, while recognising simultaneously that any meanings, or readings, thus generated are the responsibility, or at the discretion, of the reader. For example, as quoted above, the painter's pondering the 'something mysterious' inside the Inflated Man makes him 'think of Jonah and the Whale, or the pastiche of Jonah's whale

in Disney's *Pinocchio*'. A host of potential associations are immediately offered up to the reader: present, past, actual, imagined, living entity, empty structure, exteriority, interiority, writing, painting, text, image, scripture as literal truth, its pastiche – hence falsity – in the Disney picture, the descent into bathos that might be discerned in the step from whale-in-scripture to whale-in-cartoon, and so forth. As an example, let us pursue just one of these specific references further – the image of the whale in *Pinocchio* – in order to see just what sort of meanings and associations the reader might be able to produce by setting it, as a single textual element, against and beside other elements of the text.

Let us, because we can, first create an extra-textual context for the Disney reference, in order to investigate just what sort of cultural resonances and associations it might possess. Accordingly, let's begin by setting the 1974 *Shingeki* edition alongside the publication, in 1973, of Christopher Finch's seminal *The Art of Walt Disney*. This latter was the first (and remains, to this day, the major) staking of the claim not only (as its title suggests) to Disney's artistry, but also – in his commitment to the moving image – to his status as an innovator:

Disney's obsession with naturalism seems anachronistic if one places him alongside Picasso. [...] At the same time, however, Picasso's fidelity to largely traditional media – such as the stretched canvas with its built-in limitations – might be considered anachronistic when compared to Disney's pioneering of the art of imagination. Disney's great contribution was to break free of the static image.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁷ Christopher Finch, *The Art of Walt Disney: From Mickey Mouse to the Magic Kingdoms and Beyond* (New York: Abrams, 1973) p. 144.

Finch makes his claim to Disney's artistry through his taking for granted the latter's right to be compared to, and contrasted with, Picasso. His book enacts a paradox, however, inasmuch as, even as Finch stresses how Disney broke 'free of the static image', his argument is necessarily dependent, through the medium in which he makes his case, on such static images.¹⁰⁸ One might, in fact, argue that Disney's artistry is implied and guaranteed by its featuring in an art book, published by the art book specialists Abrams of New York. Each of the Disney illustrations in the book, therefore, stands as being emblematic of a conflict that can be summarised in the simple question: is this Art?; And it is one such image, from Disney's 'masterpiece', that is invoked by 'The Story of the Inflated Man': the interior of the whale.¹⁰⁹ Indeed, when the main narrator writes, of the Inflated Man, '[w]asn't he made from that hull-like skeleton, a skeleton that had those dark cavern innards, a skeleton around which flesh and skin had been stuck on?' one might contend that, for any reader who has actually seen either *Pinocchio* or the static image in Finch's book, it becomes difficult to conceive of the inside of the Inflated Man in any terms *other* than that of the Disney illustration.¹¹⁰ And once the association has been made, we might then choose to set the Disney whale – emblematic, as it is, of the is-this-Art? question – alongside the Inflated Man, who is also repeatedly figured in the story as embodying the same question:

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., p.155 (see Fig.1).

¹¹⁰ Kanai, 'Kūki otoko no hanashi', in: *Kanai Mieko: Zentanpenshū*, pp. 149-50.

A long time ago I actually saw his performance, but - how can I say this? It was a really peculiar art. Among his spectators were those who grumbled that they couldn't consider that it was a unique art, or even an art worth paying the fee to watch it. Just as there is the phrase 'an unaccomplished glutton', in the past, a glutton was like all gluttons, and didn't belong to the category of art: in other words, it was said that it was the sort of thing that only proved stupidity, the stupidity of the greedy. [...] Supporters said that watching him made them feel great. [...] We spectators would think about desire and pleasure, but, on the other hand, we could not help feeling pity for the pettiness of our appetites. This was more or less the opinion of the fans; for those who weren't fans, Peach's huge size and huge appetite were talentless - he was artless - they looked down on him as a wasteful guzzler; with such a huge body he could have become a sumo player, he was a monstrous simpleton without even ambition.¹¹¹

Billed as 'an appetite artist', the Inflated Man's 'art' is nonetheless continually brought into question by the narrator and others who watch his 'performance'; and, ultimately, the artistry of the Inflated Man is not innate; rather, it is dependent on the aesthetic judgement of his observers. Those unappreciative of the Inflated Man's act reject the category 'art' when accounting for it. Those, by contrast, who 'watch [it] and feel great' experience something akin to the sublime, as they are led to a renewed appreciation of their own mortality and humanity (inscribed here as 'the pettiness of their own appetites').¹¹² This question of adjudication might better be reformulated as one of interpretation, and it is one that we shall return to below.

For the moment, however, let us return to the image of Disney's whale, and restate that it was just one of our possible, associative readings or understandings of the painter's painting of the Inflated Man which led to the generation of these interpretive questions about 'The Story of the Inflated Man'.

¹¹¹ Ibid., pp. 147-148.

¹¹² Ibid.

If we pursue the image of Disney's whale in a different direction, are there *other* interpretive questions to which it might lead us? Certainly, we might begin a new interpretive trail, as it were, by noting the (well-documented) influence of the nineteenth-century illustrator and engraver Gustave Doré on the animators of *Pinocchio*, an influence clearly apparent in the picture of the whale.¹¹³ Having noted as much, we are then struck by a coincidence: every other single explicit literary allusion in 'The Story of the Inflated Man' – the Book of Jonah, the story of Noah's Ark, Rabelais' *Gargantua and Pantagruel* – is the subject of well-known engravings by Doré; his Rabelais edition appeared in 1854, his extensive illustrations for the Bible were first published in 1866. What are we to make of this coincidence? And what might we make of another coincidence: Kanai chose another Doré engraving, from his illustrations to Perrault's 'Sleeping Beauty', as the cover for the first edition of *The Knights of Akashia*, which is, of course, the short story collection in which 'The Story of the Inflated Man' appears.¹¹⁴ (There is a discernible further coincidence: the strikingly similar composition of the 'Sleeping Beauty' engraving with the Disney whale picture.) Confronted with these coincidences, we might begin by recollecting the referential elision between text and image that occurs when the narrator tries to imagine Peach's innards, and thinks 'of Jonah and the Whale, or the

¹¹³ The Disney Studio Library had multiple copies of Doré's illustrations of Dante's *The Divine Comedy* and Milton's *Paradise Lost*. Robin Allan notes not only a similar artistic sensibility between Disney and Doré, but also a similar desire for artistic respectability: 'Doré's technically brilliant, often vulgar and melodramatic work appealed to Disney and his artists, for whom comedy, violence and the macabre were easily juxtaposed, though both Doré and Disney longed to be recognised for serious work rather than merely for "cartoons".' Robin Allan, *Walt Disney and Europe* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999) p. 23.

¹¹⁴ See Fig. 2 for his illustration to Perrault's *Sleeping Beauty*.

pastiche of Jonah's whale in Disney's *Pinocchio*.' In trying to envisage the Inflated Man, in other words, the narrator slips from a *textual* interpretive model to a *pictorial* one: the Disney image acts as a *de facto* illustration to the Book of Jonah. One might then argue that, when the text of the story references these other literary/scriptural texts, there might be an implied invitation for the reader to conceive these allusions also in terms of being images, rather than text. In other words, 'The Story of the Inflated Man' invites us to read it *as though it were illustrated*. The main narrator's attempts to comprehend Peach result in the former's envisaging the latter as though he were a cartoon; so, too, he tells us, '[m]ore than the circus itself (the "real circus" which my parents had taken me to see), I was bedazzled by the *image* of the circus'.¹¹⁵ Moreover, through his referencing these literary allusions that are, perhaps inevitably, *pictorial* allusions, his narrative enjoins us to do the same. This not only has the effect of problematising – yet again – any representationalist narrative aesthetic; it also returns us to the question of aesthetic *value*. Textual illustrations occupy a peculiar, liminal space in any text in which they feature. Are we to regard such illustrations as part of the text which they accompany, or as being separate from it? Are we to accord them a legitimate role in generating literary meaning or artistic value? Do they compromise any putative textual integrity that we might wish to attribute to a given text; or do they, rather, foreground the fact that such textual integrity is, in fact, illusory? In short, the textual illustration asks of itself precisely the same question that we have already seen posed by the Disney animation and the Inflated Man's act: is this Art?

¹¹⁵ Kanai, 'Kūki otoko no hanashi', in: *Kanai Mieko: Zentanpenshū*, p. 146 (my italics).

Conclusion

As we move towards the conclusion of this chapter, we should begin by stressing that neither of these interpretive trails we have just followed can be legislated for as being somehow correct, or 'within' the text; no-one would plausibly claim that the 'The Story of the Inflated Man' deliberately sets out to *intend* presenting a complex constellatory matrix of meanings resolving around a dissection of the Japanese term for fiction, Disney's Pinocchio and the engravings of Gustave Doré (though one might, again, note the coincidences). Rather, our two interpretive excursions above are offered merely as instances of the *possibilities* afforded the reader when one accepts the story's implicit invitation to engage in the creative process that arises from the act of juxtaposing its various textual elements and seeing what happens. There are, to be sure, a host of other references whose resonances within and without the text, would no doubt yield, upon investigation by the reader, a host of radically different readings of the story. For instance, one might note, yet again, the 'empty structure' motif that runs throughout the story, and set it alongside, not only our narrator who paints 'only caves', but also the Inflated Man's insistence on his ultimately doomed quest to end up the shape of a perfect sphere because '[i]f god existed, wouldn't he be perfectly round in shape?'.¹¹⁶ Having registered this play of association between caves/the ideal versus the real, what would happen, what meanings might be generated, if we then invoked the most famous philosophical allegory of them all, Plato's Allegory of the Cave in the *Republic*? Similarly (or, rather, *not* similarly), what readings could we

¹¹⁶ Ibid., p. 150.

generate if we were to read the story alongside Kafka's 'A Hunger Artist'? Peach, after all, is defined as being specifically antithetical to the hunger artist; and here (to note yet another coincidence) Kanai writes that, for her, to watch Hijikata dance is to be irresistibly reminded of the Kafka story.¹¹⁷ The Inflated Man's name 'Peach' creates yet another allusion, this time to the Japanese folk story, 'Momotarō' ('Peach Boy'). As one of the most popular folk stories in Japan, and hence a narrative which has been, and continues to be, recreated again and again through songs, books, images and films, and as a narrative which, through this process of repeated retelling has spawned, and continues to spawn, multiple versions of itself, and whose continued rewriting is given over to the readership, 'Momotarō' is perhaps a prime example of a corporeal text. What might happen to our understanding of 'The Story of the Inflated Man' in light of this association, or, indeed, when set against any of these profoundly different contexts mentioned above? One further question: when raising the possibility of the text's – or rather, the reader's – generating such meanings, might it not be better to do as I have just done (and am continuing to do), and frame such a possibility *interrogatively*? Isn't that what the corporeal text does? The story's two invocations of the whale, for instance, in the story are, as we have seen, offered as instances of 'something mysterious'; they are effectively posed as a *question*. I, as reader, am *liberated* as to how I assemble and interpret the meanings, images and associations that I myself generate; and it is through the deployment of such meanings, images and associations that we see the corporeal text come into play. The 'empty structure' that is fiction is paralleled by the 'empty' (that is, identity-free) reader that Barthes identified as

¹¹⁷ Kanai, 'Nikutairon e josetsu dai'ippo', p. 22

being 'without history, biography, psychology; he is simply that someone who holds together in a single field all the traces by which the written text is constituted.'¹¹⁸ The incorporeal text, by contrast, replete as it is with *pre-determined meanings*, has, ultimately, no need of the reader. In other words, once the literary-critical-cultural establishment has determined what say, Mishima's *The Temple of the Golden Pavilion* is 'about', it renders both text and reader redundant. To quote Kanai again, the text's 'internal worlds', denied to the reader, become 'lost'; and 'I suppose that they must have an incorporeal corporeality, which doesn't belong to the body, and which lies outside of the body like a wreckage of used up words that age in written and spoken years.'¹¹⁹ Once we know what the incorporeal text means, it – with its 'wreckage of used-up words' – need never trouble us, and we need never trouble it, ever again. In contrast, the corporeal text, forever outward looking, is dependent on the reader in order for its meanings to be generated, and as such, the reader, through the act of reading, ensures that the corporeal text is only ever present *in the present*; the corporeal text and its reader engage, in other words, in a perpetual act of reciprocation, each requiring the other in order to exist. Thus, it is the living, actual conjoining of text and reader that brings the corporeal text into being. It cannot be separated from its reader; hence it cannot be separated from the physical act of reading.

¹¹⁸ Barthes, 'Death of the Author', p. 148.

¹¹⁹ Kanai, 'Kotoba/genjitsu/nikutai', pp. 67-68.

Fig 1: In the belly of Monstro



Fig 2: Gustave Doré's illustration to Sleeping Beauty



Conclusion

Around the time when I was at High School I was the most excited I had ever been – in writing things, looking at pictures, and listening to music – this was the time that my passion was at its height. In my daily life, everything had the feel of being unusual – whatever I read I had the feeling that I really sympathised with it – even looking at one picture I would become moved. It was exactly at this time that the ‘Yomiuri Independent Exhibition’ had closed and the ‘Hi-Red Center’ had formed – whether it was Akasegawa’s ‘Art Gallery of Internal Medicine’, or whatever Nakanishi was doing, I saw it and – I really liked that sort of thing. It was interesting. The ‘objets portable’ and the ‘happening’ with the clips were really cool [...] I didn’t care for whatever it is that we call ‘Art’, I suppose I merely shared the kind of excitement that comes from touching the spring of real creativity. I was forced to learn that the world and the individual do not exist (or you could say, are not absent) in so-called opposition to the other. Thanks to the Hi-Red Center.

Kanai Mieko, 'Kaku hito no kanshin - e to bungaku to' ['The Concerns of Writers: Painting and Literature']

Kanai’s writings, as we have seen, repeatedly gesture towards the generation of meaning through *association* and *tangentiality*. It is therefore fitting, I hope, to begin this conclusion by going off on a tangent of my own by discussing, briefly, the Hi-Red Center. The Hi-Red Center was one of the most notorious art performance groups of the 1960s, whose bizarre art events were designed, as a form of ‘direct action,’ to critique authority and interrupt the daily lives of people in Tokyo.¹ Their activities aimed at exposing the ‘noneverydayness’ of the mundane, and as a means of protesting and attempting to revolutionise

¹ The name ‘Hi-Red Center’ is an English transliteration of the first character of the surnames of the group’s three main members: Takamatsu Jirō, Akasegawa Genpei and Nakanishi Natsuyuki. The group was founded in May 1963, although each of its members had been involved in various artistic activities, both collaboratively and individually, before this point. Their art and its relevance to the politics of mid 1960s Japan are explored by William Marotti in *Money, Trains and Guillotines; Art and Revolution in 1960s Japan* (London: Duke University Press, 2013).

public consciousness. Their inaugural performance itself involved the group's members' riding on Tokyo's circular overground railroad, the Yamanote Line, with their faces painted white, while displaying certain '*objets portable*' that they had created specifically for the event, such as transparent polyester eggs injected with gel that held damaged everyday objects inside them.² The invitation to this event, which doubled in its purpose as a mini-manifesto of the group's aims and philosophy, was set out on card, with a diagram of the Yamanote Line on the right hand side, 'with stations and event times marked'.³ It was then handed out or posted to random members of the public. The left-hand side of the card was printed with the following statement:

In this meaningless present, we are impelled with the desire to swim about in this fluid, agitate and make it a void. From this void we must persistently attempt work that will give birth to a new, pure interaction. There is a collective body of things that refuse to rest contented within these constructions, and attempt to be a point within this void that the fluid is pregnant with. As the movement of contraction and dispersion by this collective body unfolds, it moves about the circle drawn at the right [the Yamanote Line]. Should you happen to come across this collective body in the circle, at the points fixed on the circle, at the times listed on the right, you will perhaps become a molecule agitated within this void, have your individuality wiped away and collapse into the indistinguishable crucible of you, me, us, and matter.⁴

Let us, when considering the above, set aside questions of aesthetic value; let us, too, set aside the handy biographical fact that Kanai herself, in an interview, cited them as an influence (hence my epigraph).⁵ Let us, instead, exercise the

² Ibid., pp. 219-221.

³ Marotti gives a detailed account of the event and manifesto: Ibid., pp. 219-244.

⁴ Ibid., p. 221.

⁵ Kanai talks about her interest in their work in: Otsura Sakazaki, and Mieko Kanai, 'Kaku hito no kanshin - e to bungaku to', *Bijutsu techō*, 349 (1971), 128-33, p. 134

freedom to choose to read the Hi-Red Center's invitation *metaphorically* (not least because, to read it metaphorically is to accept the invitation) choosing as the subject of our metaphor *the relationship between text and reader*. Thus, the random, nameless recipients of this invitation might resemble that destination Barthes envisaged for his Authorless text: those anonymous readers ('the collective body') who don't merely mark the destination of a text, but who also denote its (new) unity, 'giv[ing] birth to a new, pure interaction'. Just as the chance offered by the Hi-Red Center to the Tokyo commuters to subvert whatever meanings a ride on the Yamanote might yield – and what could be more predetermined in its meaning than a circular journey on a railway track? – so too, we might claim, in the wake of our discussion of the corporeal text, that Kanai's writings constantly proffer themselves to the reader in order to democratise and release their radical potential, and readily defer the generation of their respective meanings. Thus, just as for the commuter who wishes to engage with the Hi-Red Center ('you will perhaps become a molecule agitated within this void, have your individuality wiped away and collapse into the indistinguishable crucible of you, me, us, and matter'), so too, for Kanai's readers, the conventional categories of Author, reader and text will break down. In democratising the production of meaning, Kanai's writings 'wipe away' old categories of *self, man, woman, body, authority, love*. In short, we might therefore read the Hi-Red Center's invitation associatively. In other words, we might read it as a metaphor for, and as an example of, the corporeal text itself.

That Kanai's texts place in the readers' hands the possibility of producing manifold different readings becomes apparent when we see how easily and productively we might read the various texts discussed throughout

this thesis against one another. What, for instance, is Humpty Dumpty but an example – perhaps the supreme example – of *kyokō*, fiction, an empty structure? Isn't *Love Life*, with its twin matrices of interpretation that it proffers to its readers, another instance of the corporeal text, as it juggles its various, outwardly-directed potential meanings surrounding issues of the body, fictionality, and the role of the reader in generating meaning? How might we account for the Inflated Man, perpetually on the point of either exploding or decaying, when we read him against the theories of Okamoto and Sakaguchi? Might not Ai's pain as she physicalizes her abjection be situated fruitfully alongside Hijikata's Dancing-Girl-in-Pain?

As the aim of interrogative texts such as Kanai's is neither to attempt to instill in the reader a specific set of values and attitudes, nor organise a criticism of a specific set of values and attitudes, it could be argued that their challenge to convention is non-specific in its critique. It could, and has, been argued that such texts are a- or non-political; or otherwise, that, for instance, they are not 'socially useful for feminist politics'; or even that they 'ignore' important issues, such as 'the traditional gender hierarchy.'⁶ However, as we have seen time and again in this thesis, focused critique *is* achieved through those texts' use of parody and satire, modes of expression capable of exacting

⁶ Suga Hidemi argues that Kanai's writings are non-political. See 'Kanai Mieko: Hito to Sakuhin', *Shōwa Bungaku Zenshū 31* (Tokyo: Shōgakukan, 1988) pp. 961-64, p. 961. Mary Knighton argues that Kanai's early short stories are not 'socially useful for feminist politics' in 'Writing the Body as Meat: Kanai Mieko's "Rotting Meat" as Surreal Fable', in *Japanese Studies around the World 2004. Observing Japan from Within: Perspectives of Foreign Scholars Resident in Japan*, ed. by James Baxter (International Research Centre for Japanese Studies, 2004) pp. 161-88, p. 177; and Tomoko Aoyama argues that Kanai's early writings 'ignore' the 'traditional gender hierarchy' in 'Embroidering Girls' Texts: Fashion and Feminism in the Fiction of Kanai Mieko', *US-Japan Women's Journal*, 29 (2005), 99-117, p. 101.

extremely specific critiques through their mimicry and exaggeration of their targets. And it is precisely these textual strategies that, as we have seen in our discussions of say, Okamoto's *Tower of the Sun*, and Hijikata's *butō*, align Kanai's writings with the Japanese avant-garde.⁷

Returning for one last time to the adjudicatory comments of the Dazai Osamu Prize committee, let us recall that the strongest criticism of Kanai's writing was that it demonstrated a 'narcissism' that was 'physiological in basis'. The contention and conclusion of this thesis is precisely the opposite: that the writings of Kanai Mieko, in their radical decentring of the conventional relationship between reader and author, reader and text, reader and world, Kanai's writings serve (and I use the word advisedly) not only to liberate the texts themselves from the tyranny of a single, unified meaning; they also, through their constant interrogative strategies, serve to enable their readers to face the world, and to be profoundly interrogative in their turn. In this way, they offer themselves not only as interventions into the sociocultural, political and artistic debates of their time, but also as texts that insistently ask us today what one means when one conceives oneself *as* a self.

⁷ These strategies and their potential for political critique are again, amply demonstrated by Hi-Red Center's 1964 happening, the 'Ultra-Cleaning Event' (or 'Campaign for the Promotion of Sanitation and Order in the Capital' (*Shutoken seisō seiri sokushin undō*)). This event parodied the government's 'Beautification of the Capital' campaign, a campaign which, in the run up to Tokyo's hosting of the Olympic Games, attempted to conceal the squalor and decay of parts of the capital behind its renovation of the already affluent Ginza area. During the Hi-Red Center's 'Ultra-Cleaning Event', the group dressed completely in white, wore masks, and set up a notice saying 'Cleaning in Progress' in the middle of the streets in the upmarket shopping district of Ginza; members of the Hi-Red Center then proceeded to obsessively polish the tarmac and manhole covers in front of passers-by. See *ibid.*, p. 310 and Chong, Doryun, et al. *Tokyo 1955-1970: A New Avant-Garde* (New York: MoMA, 2012) p. 103.

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Appendix**The Story of the Inflated Man (A Translation of 'Kūki otoko no hanashi')**

I was introduced to a painter who only painted pictures of caves and I listened to his story. The following is what he told me.¹

Although I didn't completely believe the story of the circus, the kidnappers, and the vinegar that the kidnapped children were forced to drink to make their bodies' bones supple, I thought there was no way of doubting that, a long time ago, this kind of thing really happened. Stories like this used to hide, coolly and quietly in the ancestral ashes, in the middle of a darkened room, and sometimes leak out in a faint, rasping voice. For me, the story was too equivocal to know exactly how far in the past 'a long time ago' was supposed to refer; I had completely no idea. It was an age that crossed the boundaries of my mind to imagine; I can only describe it as being like a vast sea of grey mist, an unreasonable surreality, or a world that just simply didn't exist. As a still small child I also didn't realise that such things as 'time' and 'memory' existed inside of me. While I reacted sensitively to the stimuli of simple, everyday reality, I still lived without the concept of 'the void'. Which is to say that, at that time, I

¹ That which is printed in bold can be read in: Kanai Mieko, 'Kūki otoko no hanashi', *Shingeki*, 21 (1974), 138-44 (p. 144).

still had no knowledge of the inflated man, and had never actually seen the circus, not even once. But the circus that I had yet to encounter held a great fascination for me; it held the feel of a perfect miniature world. I suppose, if a museum is a collection of everything from natural history, the circus is a collection of everything exciting, including a zoo and an aquarium. As far as I can remember, the first time I saw the circus was when I was seven; a big circus came to the open space in the park. In the wide vacant park premises, a big khaki tent suddenly appeared, and again, suddenly disappeared. What kind of shape was the circus tent? – to make a long story short, there is such a thing as the distant view of the tent about which my memory is vague – even though I remember quite clearly the inside, the look of the thick khaki fabric seen close up, the thick wire rope firmly and tightly braced to pitch the tent, the seemingly robust steel pegs driven into the ground, and the cages of fierce animals lined up at the rear of the entrance – my memory of the shape of the whole tent when seen from a distance remains hazy and ambiguous. I suppose for children who live in the kind of cities which have zoos, predatory animals and elephants are hardly objects of envy; but for children like me from the country, the first opportunity to come into contact with real predatory beasts was at this circus which possessed the character of a moving zoo.

At the circus, all the spectators turn their faces up to watch the trapeze in mid-air, and it would be great if I could just remember the shape of the tent's ceiling, but, somehow – to continue my fruitless rambling – my only impression was that it was high – and, at the time the tents I knew were the small triangular-shaped camping tents – so from the beginning, I was under the impression that

all tents were that shape; I don't think I even tried to consider what shape the circus tent was. It also struck me as strange that the shape of something so large couldn't fit into my vision, but at any rate, I entered into it.

Aside from the fantastical speed in which the circus appeared and vanished, for me, more than the circus itself (the 'real circus' which my parents had taken me to see) I was bedazzled by the image of the circus. The knowledge I held of the circus was quite considerable. However, in reality the circus was exciting, and little children don't know how to regulate too much stimulation, so after visiting the circus I reacted by coming out in a fever. The khaki-coloured interior held the excitement of a primary colour to me; it was a world of wild excitement and tumultuous festival; a world that was extremely childish, violent, and ruled by dizzying principles, the man who held the troupe leader and wild animal trainer's whip gave orders like a furious king. For a long time I wondered if it wasn't something I had just imagined. At the very least, I'm sure over half of it was a circus composed of stories that I had read, about fierce animals, acrobats, and trapeze artists. At the present moment, in the middle of a microcosmos that does not abide by the laws of time, this circus exists; this is why it is a giant khaki-coloured balloon-shaped labyrinth.

The Inflated Man's opinion was that 'according to the potential will of the microcosmos, things that are perfect, or rather, aspirations for perfection, approximate sphericity,' – it was a simple opinion, and it wasn't just for appearances, it was an opinion by which he genuinely lived. I don't know his

real name but the stage name he went by when appearing as an entertainer at the circus, or rather his popular name, was 'Peach, The Inflated Man'; he was also called an appetite artist. Peach, of course, referred to the fruit, peach. Indeed, looking at him, he was a light pink ball, covered with soft, sparkling gold hair which made me think, not of the hard imperial peach, but of the soft pink of the white peach. When I met Peach again it was close to 30 years later and he was still performing at the circus: 'In order to eat,' he told me. If he had been a normal person, the expression 'to eat' would here mean 'everything in terms of living', 'all things rolled up together that make a life', but for Peach, The Inflated Man, when he said 'to eat', he literally meant 'to eat'. If he didn't eat a fixed, necessary amount he would slowly lose weight; if he lost weight he would cease to be 'The Inflated Man'. Putting aside the fact that The Inflated Man would cease being, he said, if death was awaiting him, he would far rather burst resolutely like a balloon that has the tip of a pin or the end of a cigarette held to it, than let the light but heavy void trapped inside of him leak out, like a balloon which slowly loses strength as the hydrogen leaks out. He was frightened of letting himself wither away. Once withered, there would be no way to claw it back. 'The Inflated Man' that he had ceased to be would even stop being a man.

A long time ago I actually saw his performance, but - how is it best to say this? It was a really peculiar art. Among his spectators were those who grumbled that they couldn't consider that it was a unique art, or even an art worth paying the fee to watch. Just as there is the phrase 'an unaccomplished glutton', in the past, a glutton was like all gluttons, and didn't belong to the category of art; in other words, it was said that it was the sort of thing that only proved stupidity:

the stupidity of the greedy. However, there were also an oppressive number of fans, and they held eating competitions – competitions in eating a lot – and competitions in eating quickly – and they said that in terms of a lay person's appetite and stomach, he had reached a high personal achievement. Supporters said that watching him made them feel great. The unbelievable appetite! Even a whale would whistle (if it had a tongue); even a horse would go away with its tail between its legs (if it could), or take off its cap (if it was wearing one). Gargantua would turn completely pale; even a one-eyed giant would have his eye opened; we would all affirm our own greed. However, from Peach's art there lacked, to a frightening degree, any sexuality. We spectators would think about desire and pleasure, but, on the other hand, we could not help feeling pity for the pettiness of our appetites. This was more or less the opinion of the fans; for those who weren't fans, Peach's huge size and huge appetite was talentless – he was artless – they looked down on him as a wasteful guzzler: with such a huge body he could have become a sumo player, he was a monstrous simpleton without even ambition.

Watching his art, I felt sick. At the time he was eating a bucket of pudding as a post-meal sweet; for a while after this, my chest would heave when pudding was served after dinner. These kind of 'human pump', 'stomach arts', or 'appetite arts' that use the digestive organs from mouth to stomach are always haunted by a certain dubiousness, or unnaturalness, and this dubiousness or unnaturalness rests on the excessive bizarreness in that which the entertainer eats, chews, or swallows. But in Peach's case, the excessive bizarreness was completely missing. It wasn't as if he strangled chickens or snakes, sucked live

blood, or devoured raw meat; nor swallowed small light bulbs in order to show us his belly through his flesh and skin, switching the light on and off; nor did he eat flames, nor gulp down glass and swords; he just innocently ate normal, everyday, common sense food – it was simply that he ate an astonishing amount. If we take breakfast as an example: (circus performances were twice daily, so Peach performed brunch and dinner) if it was Japanese style he would have a bathtub of rice, the same of miso soup, roughly five dozen eggs, one whole salted salmon, three sticks of pickled radish; if it was English style he would lightly conquer a bucket-full of orange juice, three buckets of porridge, twenty slices of toast, one pound of butter, one pound of orange marmalade, three dozen eggs, two kilograms of either bacon or ham, and four buckets of milk tea; actually seeing this kind of marvellous appetite struck me as strange even though at the time I was a child – you may say there is no art in it – indeed it does seem to be a story without art. You could even say it had a certain direct obscenity about it.

At the time he had a completely perfect round body and his body was light, so he was called The Inflated Man. Although he was light, it wasn't as if he could do any great acrobatics, he could only bounce about on a large trampoline like a giant ball. His bounce was exactly like a ball that had been pumped up with lots of air – once he was chosen by a group of three male dwarf clowns to play the football in a skit about a football match (they dressed him in clothes that had football-like black and white checkers). However, his real art was persistently eating, and actually, this attracted a lot of people. I could only think that he was, beyond doubt, like a big ball, a big ball inside of which something

mysterious was stuffed. What had been stuffed in him? I imagined a large cavern inside his body. Jonah's whale, or its pastiche, Pinocchio's whale, I thought. If the Inflated Man's innards were like a cavern, I would easily be able to fit inside, all curled up. Wasn't he made from that hull-like skeleton, a skeleton that had those dark cavern innards, a skeleton around which flesh and skin had been stuck on? Around twenty, I worked extremely hard to develop my technical skills and I drew a diagram of the inflated man's innards. Colouring it with watercolours and pencils, I drew a man whose curved bones formed a ball shape, and inside of this, I tried drawing myself curled up asleep.

For that reason, my relationship with The Inflated Man was not a shallow one (at least not in my world of imagination). You might think that this is the end of my story – but, the reason I became an artist was because of the circus' Inflated Man.

When I saw the inflated man thirty years later, he was of course, in the middle of the circus tent. He was sat in the centre of the tent's circle getting more and more full as an aging roundly-fat dwarf ran round him in circles in order to serve him food, exactly like the earth and the moon: the moon-dwarf went around the earth-giant at a dizzying speed. After the spectators had left, I spoke with him in the deserted tent.

'Owing to surface gravity, water endeavours to become like tiny beads, and all the stars in the universe are round, therefore, it is as if there is some sort of

huge will with regard to everything; I feel there is this huge will. If god existed, wouldn't he be perfectly round in shape? In order to approach becoming complete – my spherical body is a shape which ought to be pure; I don't mean this as a metaphor. I'm not talking about having a rounded personality – I've become like this by eating, but for whatever reason, I haven't been able to make people understand this. I think if I was intending to make myself into a god, I guess I would eat everything without discrimination. The circus master was always propositioned me by saying that there are arts in eating raw meat or such like, so, how about it, and perhaps you too are wondering why I don't try these, but if I ever start that sort of thing, it will be the end of me – I think I will end up cramming absolutely everything inside my body. My body will become like Noah's Ark. By the way, because I have, as you had the insight to see a long time ago – even when you were a small child – or perhaps I ought to say because you were a child – a cavern inside my body, I am something like a blown-up ball or balloon. Food is something that should become blood and flesh; but in my case I suppose I should say it becomes a kind of air, a void that has no substance, that continues to expand. My skeleton is made of something akin to a flexible rubber and for the reason that, like a rubber balloon, I can be stuffed with a lot of void. I am frightened of deflating, and I am even frightened to think what would happen if I continue to inflate, balloons that inflate too much burst in the place where the rubber has become weakened and thin.'

It is true that he was easily over a size bigger than when I saw him as a child. This means that he must have kept on getting bigger and bigger: the size that I felt him to be as a child would have used my own body as a kind of means of

comparison, moreover, the fact that I thought that he had expanded (and let's face it, I had also continued to inflate his body – or I should say – his ball) means that he himself had easily surpassed even my inflated ball.

I felt as if, just like Jonah, I had been swallowed up into his cavern. His strange aspiration was ridiculous; it was a childishly selfish, violent ambition that above all, I think, ridiculed people. For whom, is a sort of empty, round-shaped human necessary? Of course, as a spectacle, that's different, but from his point of view it was not inevitable that he would become a spectacle. I suppose there was the fully persuasive reason that if he didn't perform at the circus, he wouldn't be able to be supplied with huge amounts of food, but even then, that he would be *seen*, that people's eyes (or their gaze) would be necessitated; for instance, because he was different from that famous hunger artist, in that sense, he was not an artist; his existence made a mockery of artists. In order for a hunger artist to prove that he has definitely not taken even one morsel into his mouth, discerning onlookers are necessary at every moment during the fast. In order to prove his fasting, others must be present. But in Peach's case, I wonder if it is it really necessary to be seen by others?

What was necessary in order to prove the cavern? What was necessary in order to gain people's approval that all food became a kind of air that resembled a void-like thing as he continued to inflate? However, at the end of the day, he completely lacked the desire to make people approve. By chance, I was the one who realised his wish.

Above is the story I heard from the painter. He added that he only realised at that time that the void which filled the cavern inside the Inflated Man and the inside of the unpopular circus tent were exactly the same as the skeleton (precisely like a hull – the ship’s womb – stood on its head). ‘The Inflated Man *was* the circus’, I nodded as he continued. ‘So, rather foolishly, I was inside of a world contained within a man called Peach.’ ‘What did you intend to do if he inflated too much and burst,’ I asked the painter. ‘Would you have become the Inflated Man?’²

² That which is printed in bold can be read in: Kanai Mieko, 'Kūki otoko no hanashi', *Shingeki*, 21 (1974), 138-44, p. 144.