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## The World We Live In: Human Subjectivity, Psychological Breakdown, and the Urban Environment in Japan Literature of the 1920s

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The World We Live In: Human Subjectivity, Psychological Breakdown, and the Urban  
Environment in Japanese Literature of the 1920s

Senior Project Submitted to  
The Division of Languages and Literature  
of Bard College

by  
Carmen Chen

Annandale-on-Hudson, New York

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To my dear Curiosity and Love to 日本文学



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To my intimate group Icy, Wandi, and Pendle: 除了谢谢真的不知道还有什么可以表达了

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## Introduction

After reading literary pieces about depression like Akutagawa Ryūnosuke's last writings and "Remon" ("Lemon", 1924) by Kajii Motojirō, and knowing the many suicides by famous Japanese writers such as Akutagawa and Dazai Osamu, I became curious about the reasons behind this particular phenomenon in the early 20th century, which was a prosperous period of urban living. At the same time, I often related my own experiences in an on-going conversation with my friends about personal issues and struggles dealing with feelings sometimes unexplainable of self doubt and despair many times. Questions came into my head: why are people feeling so restless in modern times, when everything has become so convenient and efficient? What has triggered the formation of this vague, obscure sense of anxiety that is so indescribable? What are actually the problems within the urban space that we have close contact with everyday? With these questions in hand, I threw myself into reading various modern Japanese texts that deal with the theme of urban life, the disturbances coming within the typical modern settings. At the end of this process, I decided to compose a project that centers around this thesis: that the authors of these reading texts of modern Japanese literature use techniques of different points of view, sensational imagery, and symbolism to show the process of destruction and rebuilding of human subjectivity vis-a-vis the urban environment, which contributes psychological breakdown from the urban experience. Through unique narrative techniques, the authors endeavor to articulate how the physical setting and psychological realm structure the way one perceives and conceptualizes certain values and ideas that essentially produce one's action

and character, exhibiting their profound understanding and appreciation of the charm and harm of the modern.

This thesis examines selection of texts from the 1920s by Kawabata Yasunari, Akutagawa Ryūnosuke, Yokomitsu Riichi, Yoshiyuki Eisuke, Ryūtanji Yū, and Hayama Yoshiki, in order to explore three major points. First, through an investigation of the daily life of people in the neighbourhood of Asakusa, we can see how the human body is made into a spectacle, and how the area of Tokyo's inability to negotiate modern life leads to alienation, confusion, and uneasiness. Second, we consider the interiority of urban citizens, and the process of mental breakdown. It is notable that the production and status of literature have been fully commodified. Finally, here through a series of modernist short stories, we examine the eternity of urban life in modern Japan, considering the shapes and material aspects of urban space, such as tangible geometric and abstract shapes that represent the city, the movement of money, and the materiality of the medium concrete. We will see how the operation of the city involves exploitation of human beings such as energy and emotional resources, through the engagement with concrete.

These authors both celebrate modernity but also critique it. In this project, I aim to use these texts to disclose what is hard to see amongst the illusions created by the city, and the assumption of free sovereignty over our orality and actions. I hope that at the end of this project, we will gain a thorough insight on how these writers of modern Japanese literature seek to understand a notion of subjectivity that has been both created and destroyed by the modern urban life, as how they produce different perspectives to analyze the city an intricate pieces of setting and structure. These texts present a critical view exposing how capitalist modernity profoundly

influences the individual, even while celebrating the playful liveliness that modernity has brought into our world.

In chapter one, “The Concept of Loss”, I will examine Kawabata Yasunari’s *Asakusa Kurenaidan* (*The Scarlet Gang of Asakusa*, 1930), giving a close reading of the body as spectacle and how individual sensations and perceptions change along with the transformation of Asakusa. I chose this work because it particularly contains rich details and scenes of daily group activities: dancers, teenagers, and beggars, who live in the periphery of society, struggling to grasp a sense of belonging in this alluring place. From there, we gain a clear view of how place and individuals transform each other, contributing to the energy and enchantment of the place as a whole.

In chapter two, “Akutagawa and His Literary Struggle,” I will be providing an analysis of Akutagawa Ryūnosuke’s two posthumously published writings, “Haguruma” (“Spinning Gears,” 1927) and “Aru ahō no isshō” (“The Life of A Stupid Man,” 1927), focusing on the relationship between the narrator, which Akutagawa has partially projected himself into, and the reading and writing of literature. I selected these two works because they were important in my own introduction to the problem of modernity in Japanese literature. More importantly, in these two writings, Akutagawa communicates his most inner thoughts, reflections, and subtle observations produced through his intimate engagement with literature and the real world. It is important to understand how the system of capitalism has transformed the production of literature, and hence how the practices of reading and writing have informed writers and intellectuals whose perceptions and knowledge of Japan and the world as structures through this commercialized mode of literary practice. By looking at both the narrator and Akutagawa’s experiences, we are

able to see that writers have attempted to reveal their sentimental reactions to modern urban life by portraying sensations that are unusual, disturbing, and irrational.

In chapter three, I take up four intriguing short texts: “Machi no soko” (“The Underside of Town,” 1925) by Yokomitsu Riichi, “Hanayaka na Shinjuku ni tsuite” (“Colorful Shinjuku,” 1930) by Yoshiyuki Eisuke, “Peibumento sunappu—yonaka kara asa made” (“Pavement Snapshots,” 1930) by Ryūtanji Yū, and “Semento Daru no naka no tegami” (“Letter in a Cement-Barrel,” 1926) by Hayama Yoshiki. I will analyze these four texts to different representations of urban space in terms of its tangible structures of street mapping and the intangible attributes of human exploitation of energy and emotional resources. I selected these four texts because the combination offers a complete view on urban, exposing both outer physical appearances and perceptual appearances. To the previous two chapters in modernist literature, I looked at the microscopic aspects of the city. Chapter Three serves as a guide which closely examines the macroscopic aspects beyond the outside frame, structure, and concrete material, which are all aspects that physically compose a modern city. This chapter also examines how these features have inevitably influenced one’s psychological perception on the self and the city. It is interesting to see how authors take these realistic and striking descriptions and project them into the living experience of individuals.

### *General Overview*

Throughout the project, I have incorporated some important ideas from several academic scholars. Their writings have provided a strong foundation and rich background for me to further develop and expand my own ideas. Here, I am going to give a general overview of their ideas I

was inspired by as well as how I have taken a different approach in my own analysis. For the discourse on Asakusa, Maeda Ai's essay "Asakusa as Theater: Kawabata Yasunari's *The Crimson Gang of Asakusa*" has provided a thorough examination of the geographic mapping of the Asakusa region, including the history of theater construction and the pleasure district. From there, he builds his analysis upon this spatial perspective, explaining the changing, polytropic phenomena that take place in Kawabata's *Asakusa Kurenaidan*. As he says, "In this unique spot, with its blend of the old and new Asakusa, might well lie the key to decoding the kaleidoscopic work that is *The Crimson Gang*, combining both historical detail and literary representation of Asakusa (Maeda 148). In this project, I draw my analysis less on the physical concrete space of Asakusa than on the people who dwell in it, especially the dancing girls and the gang of juveniles, in order to discuss both the appeal and the problems of this well-known region. Maeda discusses the character of Yumiko, pointing out her function as a representative figure in relation to the actual place: "...the real source of the confusion created by Yumiko's masquerading lies in her status as an androgynous figure" (Maeda 153). In addition to Maeda's point about how Yumiko represents the ways that Asakusa enacts a bewildering sensation on both the place and people, I explore the relationship between her character and public on traumatic memory, which can help explain the confusing ambiguity of her gender and masquerade appearance.

Furthermore, I have incorporated the findings of Seiji M. Lippit and Nathan Shockey in my chapter on Akutagawa Ryūnosuke. By reading Lippit's chapter "Disintegrating Mechanisms of Subjectivity: Akutagawa Ryūnosuke's Last Writings" in his book *Topographies of Japanese Modernism*, I was deeply inspired by his argument, that "For Akutagawa, the concept and practice of literature had been the basis of a consciousness of modernity defined as

‘universal’—that is, a world in which the distance between Japanese and Western culture had been largely eliminated” (Lippit 41). Based on this idea of “universality” in literature, I meticulously look at the on-going interactions between the narrator and foreign literatures and languages, as the narrator realizes that this seeming “universality” is bound with other factors in reality and that he has never stepped out of the boundary within the practice of literature. I claim to demonstrate how Akutagawa’s anxiety and mental breakdown links to his concern about the production of literature through his relationship with the bookstore Maruzen. Shockey states that “Maruzen is a disorienting site of psychological breakdown,” hinting that the building is not merely a store but a center radiating traumatic ordeal (Shockey 97). In terms of interpreting the “breakdown” of the narrator at the bookstore, Shockey gives an explanation of the hallucination of the disruptive gears: “The content of the book is rendered irrelevant, replaced by the madness of the hallucinatory mechanical vision as the industrially reproduced book reflects back the psychological state of the mechanized modern subject and the inherent strangeness of consumerism for the author’s old-fashioned head” (Shockey 97). Lippit takes a similar viewpoint on how the role of the bookstore has contributed to the ultimate mental collapse of the narrator, stating “The center of the cultural space represented by the bookstore is now occupied by the frightening apparition of gear teeth, indicating the eruption of madness into the carefully constructed world of rationality” (Lippit 56). Building on their analyse, I additionally consider the content of the specific literary works that Akutagawa has purposely included in the story “Haguruma,” trying to figure out the reason behind his self reflection that he finds threatening and dreadful, as the narrator dives into reading, a practice through which he often finds peace and and respite. While Lippit observes that “In particular, Akutagawa’s last writings outline an

anxiety concerning the status of literary practice, a concern that plays a central role in modernist literature” (Lippit 40), I turn my attention to another aspects of Akutagawa’s writing— his physical and mental struggles in real life. With the analysis of the bookstore and close experience with literature, I combine the study of Akutagawa’s use of medication, his obsessive despair and apprehension regarding his biological mother’s insanity, and how his surroundings are overstimulating, deteriorating his mental condition. By incorporating Lippit and Shockey’s ideas, I am able to arrive at a more thorough depiction of Akutagawa’s mental breakdown and its effect on his literary practice.

As an effort to open up a conversation on urban space, I refer to some of Shockey's ideas. For example, when talking about Yokomitsu’s text “Machi no soko,” Shockey concludes that “the protagonist’s movement within the city and his grasp of the exchange relationship imbued in the money form produce a more ordered vision of the city that allows the high city and the low city to be grasped as a totality beyond this apparent fragmentation,” stating that the system of capitalism and the practice of consumerism have structured people’s perception of their daily activities, making them conceptualize the city based on the flow of money and commodities (Shockey 150). Moving forward from Shockey’s ideas, I focus on the abstract yet tangible shapes of urban space, taking into consideration how these shapes have offered other ways of perceiving the city, and understanding how people orient themselves and their movements. As an attempt to grasp the space from as many points of view as possible, I endeavor to explore the element of concrete, deciphering its function, materiality and significance in the operation of the city and people in modernist literary representation.

### *Chapter Summary*

This project contains three chapters. In Chapter One, I will look at the story *Asakusa Kurenaidan* (1930) by Kawabata Yasunari, about the representation of body spectacle in relation of the Asakusa region flowing and changing dynamics, through Kawabata's unique first- and third-person point of view, vivid imagery and rich dialogues amongst characters. I identify the loss of attachment, which is embodied in three different aspects of the story. First is the bodily representation of the dancing girls and the audience. The chapter delves into the particular body form and structure that are cultivated and displayed for shows and revues. From there, we see how the body has been commodified as an object for view, fulfilling and at the same time evoking erotic desire further in the minds as bodies of the audience. Driven by the obsession with nudity, the audience is nonetheless made into a component of this alluring bodily spectacle as they unconsciously manipulate their own bodies for the performance. In this regard, the loss is present as the loss of control over the physicality of one's own body, both for the dancing girls and the spectators.

Next, the second aspect is the changing perception of mass culture, where the core content of traditional cultural phenomena are still visible, yet transformed into something more easily acceptable and appreciated within a modern context. The remarking of private and public space for personal living and communal activities is a notable phenomenon, which admits an immense loss of sense of belonging that is built upon one's close relationship with local culture. Last but not least, we turn our attention to the restless juveniles. Incorporating historical background information, we can analyze the behaviors to gain an understanding of children in prewar Japan and the reality of working class families. The group lives under certain

circumstances and have developed aggressive attitudes that distinguish them from the society at large. At the same time, they are active as a source of energy necessary for the flourishing of Asakusa. Nonetheless, Yumiko allows us to discuss the haunting alienation and uncertainty gained from the new perception of gender; her character is utilized by Kawabata as a representation of how society can deal with loss, traumatic experience, and the memory of the Great Earthquake of 1923.

Chapter Two is devoted to discussing the literary struggles of Akutagawa Ryūnosuke, including analysis on his intimate relationships with foreign languages, writer's financial realities and commercial literary production, as the boundaries of current literary practice and stimulus arousing further mental breakdown in addition to mental illness—that might have potentially been the source for his “vague anxiety.” Analyzing his two short stories, “Haguruma” (1927) and “Aru ahō no isshō” (1927), and examining his complex first-person narration and self reflection, I have three sections of this chapter, with the first section about the interruptions brought by foreign languages and literatures. By closely observing the narrator's self-reflection and inner thinking, we see how his interactions with specifically the English, French, and German languages spontaneously evokes bizarre visual associations, which significantly impact on his perception of himself and objects around. At the same time, the use of foreign languages somehow troubles him, as he loses his ability for proper verbal expression in his native Japanese language. The second section emphasizes on the bookstore Maruzen and its function as not merely a fashionable, unprecedented modern center for books, but as a place where intellectuals gained knowledge and cognition of foreign cultures. I pick up on small clues to talk about how the bookstore has reshaped countless writers' perceptions of Japan and the world of literature,

including Akutagawa. Within the bookstore, we also witness the on-going process of the commodification of literature, in which class and capitalist values are embodied through certain aspects of the business of publication. Writers at the time struggled to balance financial reality and family responsibility. In this close contact between the publisher and the bookstore, the narrator has realized that there are certain limitations to the power of literature that are impossible to achieve. The last section continues the discussion by studying Akutagawa's mental illness and his experience of reading literature. We can see how Akutagawa had suffered a series of severe physical and mental diagnoses and therefore required excessive consumption of drugs, along with the obsessive fear and anxiety toward his mother's insanity and his potential inheritance of that illness. Furthermore, after gathering indications of endless visual stimuli present in the city and in the works of literature, we can see that the stimuli further hinders the narrator's endeavor to find settlement, due to negative signs and ominous premonitions targeted against him. At last, we try to decipher the occurrence of the "second self," which the character of the narrator in his writing can be claimed to represent Akutagawa but is not Akutagawa himself; this split self it can be seen as Akutagawa's attempt to challenge and explore limits and solutions to these medium problems that beyond his previous work. We then consider the success and failure that he had encountered over the course of these attempts in these posthumously published works.

Chapter Three starts by adventuring into four selected modernist short fiction pieces, with a thorough investigation of urban space, from perspectives on the physical and perceptual setting and people's interaction with space, paying close attention to the descriptive symbols and motif imagery of buildings, air, machines, and movement. Like the previous chapter, this chapter is

divided into three sections. The first section brings to the various forms of visualization of urban space. In Yokomitsu Riichi's "Machi no soko," (1925) we see the use of geometric shapes to show how specific urban planning construction affects the movements and activities of people, leading to a view of the whole city with depth. In another point of view, we see a personified image of the city Tokyo as a seductive female in Yoshiyuki Eisuke's "Hanayaka na Shinjuku ni tsuite," implying that the city has special characteristics that constantly produce alluring desires, which materializes people's actions and mindsets as a way to recreate the liveliness of the city. At some point, we see the mutual relationship between the space and people as they influence each other in an interactive way in Ryūtanji Yū's "Peibumento sunappu—yonaka kara asa made" (1930). In the next section, we discover how people's subjectivity has been materialized through a capitalist mode of living. In "Hanayaka na Shinjuku ni tsuite" (1930), we witness the consumption of bodily energy and emotion as a commodified product in exchange for income and pleasure. In the last section I discuss the role of concrete, which is an important component of buildings and a symbol for a city to be called "modern." Focusing on the details in Hayama Yoshiki's "Semento Daru no kana no tegami" (1926), we see how the use of concrete has created an isolated and enclosed space that surrounds the whole city and traps people inside its tall buildings and dizzying light and sound emissions. There is a mysterious alienation aroused from this everyday experience, with a sensory impression of cold and unbreakable space for living and working. We nonetheless realize the cruelty of these pieces of thick concrete bricks, as they dehumanize one's being. The element of concrete manipulates not only feelings but bodies in the act of laboring, in which the body is fully exploited into the production of concrete, for the purpose of operation of the prosperous city. Under the implementation of the capitalist mode of

living and working, we are made unconscious about the abstract yet profound incessant effect that the city has upon modes of our sensation and perception when we are so engrossed in our own complicated living situations. At the end of this project, I hope that my readers will be able to conceptualize the urban space we live in from a new perspective, and be aware of how the self and space evolve together into new realms.

## Chapter 1 The Concept of Loss: Kawabata Yasunari's *Asakusa Kurenaidan*

During the 20th century, Asakusa was a famous entertainment district in Tokyo, with vigorous theaters, cinemas, and aquariums constructed within the so-called “Sixth District” (*rokku*). If one were to learn about Asakusa, Kawabata Yasunari is an expert in capturing exclusive details on this region of pleasure. In his book *Asakusa Kurenaidan*, Kawabata has shown us a great mapping of Asakusa, displaying not only the beauty and uniqueness of the modern culture yielded in this area, but also the extraordinary charm of the ugliness hidden behind all the colorful and dazzling images Asakusa presents itself. At the beginning of Section 10, Kawabata opens by saying that Asakusa is a place where “All races, all classes, all jumbled together forming a bottomless, endless current, flowing day and night, no beginning, no end” (Kawabata 30). No doubt that even if one has never actually walked the streets of Asakusa, one would find its abundant richness of culture and the endless life energy to be a major attraction. While reading with curiosity and appreciation toward this place, nonetheless, I grasped a great sense of loss in Kawabata’s novel. Not that I found myself lost in viewing the variety and playfulness of pleasure; instead, I found how people who live there are lost. Living within an urban space with constant changes, there is a loss of attachment to the sense of belonging. What Kawabata’s vision mean by loss of attachment is that people in Asakusa seem to be disconnected from the space, or I should say, the people and the place are oddly yet loosely attached to each other, as they try to recreate a new sense of belonging in a new modern context follows reconstruction after the Great Earthquake of 1923. In the novel, there seems to be an impression of loneliness disclosed in people’s daily activities that Kawabata perceives in his observations—

the dancing girls, the performance of revues, the excessive sex, the commercialized shops, the “rebellious” juveniles. The characters are obsessed with the artificial and superficial aspects of Asakusa, but find their feelings of loneliness only enlarged and never completely fulfilled. The consumption of pleasure and time leads to the characters themselves being consumed in this unending wave of sensation, where in their own sensations, they are simultaneously made numb. The sense of belonging, which characters seek, is devoured with the experience of constant changing changes to daily routine. The desire to integrate themselves to the modern environment, nevertheless results in the disintegration of the characters that there is still a gap between what they are expecting and what they are able to accomplish in actual life.

In this chapter, I examine this idea of the loss of attachment, which we can say is a universal medium experience still present in the 21st century of today, with attention to five dimensions: the physicality and bodily representation of the dancing girls, the gaze and body of the audience, the reformation of traditional mass culture into modern, the image of the troubled youth and the representation of the main female character Yumiko, who is an outstanding member of the Scarlet Gang and introduces the narrator to the marginalized region of Asakusa in the first 26 sections in the book. Her character is such an interesting topic as she displays herself in blurring gendered disguises. In this chapter, I explore some of the unsettling aspects within an urban space, investigating the bodily movement of the dancing girls and the spectators and the activities of the premature youth. By doing such an investigation, I try to understand how Kawabata exposes the various social conditions of marginalized groups that are covered behind the beautiful appearance of Asakusa.

*The Body Representation of the Dancing Girls*

Throughout the story, Kawabata includes a noticeable amount of detail on the physical body of individuals, and it is within this exposure of the physical body that the idea of loss is revealed. One of the outstanding spectacles depicted in the story *Asakusa Kurenaidan* is the dancing girls at the revues. We see a wide range of girls performing in shows: foreign girls, girls who are only fourteen or fifteen or even younger, girls with different hairstyles, dressed in different outfits. From the description of their appearances on the stage, what we see is not just a live human being performing, but also how an individual is seen as a bare body, a puppet for viewing. Tracing the history of theaters at the beginning of the Showa period (1926-1989) gives some clues about where this prevalent eroticism started to spread, and how it won a great success in becoming an iconic sight of Asakusa. In one of his analyses on *Asakusa Kurenaidan*, the critic Maeda Ai sketches out the overall urban space layout of Asakusa, and needless to say, the Casino Folies, described as “Japan’s first revue” by Maeda, is included as one of the main subjects of modern Asakusa culture. Casino Folies was housed in a well-known aquarium (*Suizokukan*), which was located within the Okuyama area. It first opened in July 1929 and included the Nomura Girls’ Opera Troupe last, yet did not immediately earn much audience. The show was then redesigned by Utsumi Masanari, who suggested a combination with a revue produced by Mack Sennett. However that did not turn out well either. By then, it was that “[e]very imaginable means was employed to lure customers, from price discounting (from 40 to 30 sen) to a change of venue (including a trial-run ‘sand dune review’ on a Kamakura beach), but to no avail,” as Maeda mentions (Maeda 148). This effort of creating a spectacle attraction continued until the second Casino Folies was put on stage with young dancers and wide-spreading “rumors that the

dancing girls would be dropping their drawers,” which gained the theater a good start of making profits for the very first time (Maeda 148). The advertisement of eroticism as a stunt made the revue a sustainable business, and hence it became an essential element and outstanding feature of the revue. The presence of Casino Folies was then popularized around the region, breeding new and fresh energy into Asakusa as it gradually recovered from the losses of the Great Earthquake of 1923. While the performances of the show were alluring, there is something within the show that remains controversial and requires a closer examination on the essence of this spectacle—that is to say the girls’ bodies.

What is worth noticing here is the physicality of the girls’ bodies in Kawabata’s novel. When Haruko sees foreign girls walking down the streets dressed as the dancers, it reminds her of how she sees the real dancers, “But the little-girl waists of the Japanese dancers, there’s nothing juicy about them, just dryness” (Kawabata 118). “Dryness” (*kochi kochi*) is not just associated with the condition of the skin, but also with the overall image of the girls’ skinny, skeleton-like bodies. We can conclude this because “nothing juicy” (*suiki ga naku*) was stated previously. When the girls’ bodies move on the stage, Kawabata is creating a contradictory feeling of how a dancer supposedly dances with an extensive amount of energy, but in reality, only dances with a body of “nothing juicy” and “dryness”. Another image that the narrator brings up after hearing Haruko’s impression on the street girls’ dressing and their skinny body shape, portrays the Russian dancers as their legs are “glossy in their transparent whiteness, covered with scented oil, and, when they strike their high heels on the night asphalt, those legs are as fresh and firm as the green hozuki plants” (Kawabata 118-119). It sounds very reasonable with the characteristics of “whiteness” (*sukitooru shirosa*), “fresh” and “firm” (*tsuyatsuya shisha*), as

these merits of the bodies are part of the reasons why revues are so popular and attractive. It might just be their original bodily appearance and shape thanks to genetics, none but less the bodies presented by the dancers here are closer to a commercialized product made for viewing. The body's phases are preserved for the show as for the audience, whether voluntary or not. The dancers' bodies are constructed in a way to better fit the standard of a revue dancer and attract more attention, evoking people's desire to come and watch through the exposure of the body, where the body parts are clearly visible. The way of how the bodies are presented creates the sense that these dancers are not present as mere dancers on the stage, but have become the show itself. While reading the scenes of dancing girls, if there was not an introduction of a particular dancer within the conversation between the narrator and the characters, it would be impossible to distinguish who they are talking about, due to the lack of uniqueness of these dancers as each single dancer is anonymous, but at the same time they are so indispensable as a whole for a show.

Moreover, the nudity of girls' bodies is being excessively consumed and employed for the success and popularity of the revues. In the variety show discussed above, between the transition of scenes, the narrator witnesses how "the dancers are in such a hurry to change their costumes in the darkness at the end of the stage that you can see their bare breasts" (Kawataba 33). The seeing of "bare breasts" (*chibusa*), which seems like an accident, but in fact might be part of the show as a "bonus" service, is another selling point for the audience. On one hand, the scenes are packed with a tight schedule such that the girls do not have enough time to change costumes in between, hence they would have to change while on stage. On the other hand, according to the narrator, where the girls change is a place of "darkness," which is not supposed

to be seen, yet still is visible from outside. A proper space for changing, such as a fitting room for the girls, is missing. The girls do not have a choice but to let their bodies be seen by the audience, which they are actually not conscious about. Later on in the story, the narrator provides us several billboard headlines from a few theaters that he observes. Here are three examples:

- EROTICISM (エロ情緒, *ero jōcho*) FLOWING FROM THEIR BEAUTIFUL PEARL-WHITE NAKED BODIES (裸体, *ratai*), THE RUSSIAN DANCER MISS VARENNA RADSENKO AND HER TROUPE (Shochiku Theater, Kawataba 129),
- MAJOR DANCE REVOLT OF THE NAKED (裸体, *ratai*) IT GIRLS (Nihon Theater, Kawataba 134), and
- GREAT NAKED (裸体, *ratai*) MARCH ALL AND EVERYTHING GROTESQUE! (Tokyo Theater, Kawataba 135)

All these advisements have in common is the expression 裸体, *ratai*, which explicitly means the physical naked body. By reading these headlines, it is not clear to what extent the “naked” body is being exposed during the show, but what is certain is that the dancing girls have lost the sovereignty of their bodies. As mentioned previously, the girls have lost control of their own body’s shape and condition and how to move their body in the dance; here we can see that they also lose the control of what to show of their bodies, and what to be exposed to the public, as if the access to their body is now completely sold to others. Privately intimate nudity, is thus made to be easily accessible and used by others, in this case, by the theaters as an advertisement to evoke interest and appeal to those who enjoy the exposure. The girls dragged into the industry of revue and commercial performance open to the public, have lost the sense of belonging to themselves and being a dancer seems to be the only “shelter,” the only way to stay attached, while their alienated bodies are from themselves.

*The Representation of the Audiences' Body*

This spectacle of exposure is not only present with the girls on stage but also is in regard to who is watching in front of the stage: the audience. The audience appears to be mostly men, which is not surprising. There are also female audiences like Yumiko and Haruko, yet the viewing experience seems to differ between the male and female spectators in terms of what they are looking at. The men tend to watch superficially the show itself while the women tend to watch the individual dancers instead. There is a particular scene where Yumiko and the narrator are watching a variety show. One male audience watches and reacts, “That little one dancers pretty good, doesn’t she?” and the other replies, “She should. Her grandmother or someone like that was a famous dance teacher” (Kawabata 34-35). This is how Yumiko sees, “The little one. She’s named Umezono Ryuko. Hate to disappoint you, but I hear she’s only fifteen,” (Kawabata 35). It is interesting to observe the different perspectives of male and female audience as male audiences are more attracted to the overall dance performance and presentation of the girls’ bodies like how art objects are presented in a gallery, while the female audience members are interested in the person, instead of looking at them as barely a form of visual pleasure. What I want to highlight in particular is the male’s perspective, and it is this perspective that contributes to the image of the lively yet empty, composed bodily spectacle.

According to the narrator, the revues attract all kinds of people, such as playboys, rich old men, and beggars and bums who occupy a large proportion of the audience. Here is one scene of them watching:

Beggars and bums watching (眺めてゐる, *nagametewiru*) the modern style dancing of the powdered naked bodies (裸体, *ratai*). This bizarre scene of local

color is also Asakusa... every night without fail, you'll probably spot some odd man, his face masked with beard, grime, and duet, dressed in rags, leaning against the pillar to the left of the pit, absorbed (しみじみと、ジャズ・ダンスに見とれてみる, *shimijimi to, jayazu dansu ni mitoretewiru*) in the jazz dances. Outside, three men, five men, stand in the cold to stare (見ようとする, *miyou to suru*) at the dancers as they leave (Kawataba 37).

In this passage, the usage of the two words “watch” and “stare” is particularly interesting to discuss. Although both words mean the act of looking with one’s eyes, there is a different level of intensity. In the English context, “watch” is a way of seeing something specific for a period of time. In the case of describing the audience, by “watching” it implies that some of the spectators are focusing on the show but in a more general, mild way of looking. It can be “watching” the performance or the dancers as a whole. In the Japanese context, the word *nagameteiru* also implies a similar meaning of seeing an object from a broad point of view. Whereas “stare” in English, on the other hand, is a way of looking at one object in particular for a period of time. In Japanese, Kawabata uses 見ようとする instead of 見る, which is the general word for looking, and implies that one is putting effort into the act of looking. By using “stare” in the passage, it amplifies how some of the audience are gazing at the girls intensely (しみじみ is an adverb meaning keenly, seriously, deeply; it is used here to specify the degree of the attention paid on the girls) with strong impulse or purpose, as if the male spectators could not wait to fix their eyes on the girls’ bodies. The similar usage of the word “stare” also appears before the showcase of the performance as well, where the narrator spots a group of vagrants gathering together in front of the movie theaters where the posters are put up. They “bathed in the early morning sunlight, they happily stare” (Kawataba 20). The reactions of these vagrants when looking at the posters tells us how deeply entranced they were by the girls on the paper.

Whether it is “watch” or “stare,” the act of seeing in the passage presents a great sense of obsessiveness by the audience not on the show as a whole but on the “naked bodies.” By the act of looking, not only are the dancers on the stage being consumed by the audience, but at the same time the audience is itself being consumed. To fulfill the act of watching, these men have to move their bodies toward the theater, and maintain a pose of standing in one spot unmoved for a long time, even “in the cold,” “every night without fail.” Moreover, no matter how messily and unsanitary they dress, the tramps would just go to watch, not paying attention to how other people might feel about them. It seems there is some indescribable force of the *renve* as a spectacle, evoked by the girls, that produces and stimulates the desire of seeing and eventually the commitment of being a member of the spectacle. The bodies of the dancers are presented in favor of the audience, and the audience reacts in fondness by making their body respond to the performance. This weird body-watching-body relationship converts the dancers on the stage and the spectators watching off the stage together as parts of a larger objectified spectacle of Asakusa itself.

The exposure of and the obsession within the human body itself reveal lack of control over one’s body. The girls on the stage, seem to not worry about their body being exposed to the public and even enjoy seeing how their exposure charms the audience and wins popularity for themselves; the audience’s body and attention is “devoured” by the act of seeing, allured by the erotic intention the *revue* structure creates. Dancing, seeing bodies, then going home, day after day—behind the visual spectacle is the loneliness and sadness, where the both the dancers’ and audiences’ loss of bodily control and their own consciousness of their doing immerses them into

this carnival of bodies and eroticism—as the narrator says, “lured by the mysterious charm of Asakusa” (Kawabata 178).

The phenomenon of the spectacle is even more intriguing when considering the history of Asakusa itself as a spectacle. In *Topographies of Japanese Modernism*, Seiji M. Lippit spends a chapter deciphering representations of urban space and modern culture in Kawabata’s *Asakusa Kurenaidan*. Lippit points out that Asakusa had operated as a space open for display, “serv[ing] as a conduit for presenting to the public new technologies and devices of visibility” (Lippit 142). The neighbourhood hosted exhibitions of paintings and innovative electrical devices that were newly made. By showing how the Twelve Story Tower (*Junikai*) was constructed and placed as the central point where the whole city could be absorbed to view, Lippit asserts that not only the objects were being displayed and being observed, but the city itself was also transformed into an object to be observed as well (Lippit 142). From this spectacle nature of Asakusa, it is fascinating to see how the place continuously creates and recreates vibrant scenes of spectacles, enchanting more and more people into the intoxicating realm of looking; at the same time the place Asakusa itself is inevitably devoured by this obsessive practice of looking, exploiting itself to expand its effect on observers. It is because of this duality that the people involved are unable to reject the peculiar grotesque of “erotism, nonsense, [and] speed” (Kawabata 31) that enables Asakusa to “update” and generate new images to attract more people. This region circulates its impact on its people day to day, while also flourishing with vitality and impacting the formation of modern culture in significant ways.

*The Presence of Mass Culture*

The narrator of *Asakusa Kurenaidan* speaks about the experience of loss within regard to the various cultural aspects of Asakusa. The Great Earthquake of 1923 smashed the neighborhood into ruins. There was a great loss of lives and buildings were crushed and burned down. Reconstruction soon took place and since then Asakusa has presented itself with a new image of an urban space. The incorporation of the tradition and the contemporary modern cultures is also an aspect that has made Asakusa unique. Nonetheless, as we follow the eyes of the narrator, we see inevitable changes of how traditional culture is being presented and the way people deal with memory and images that connect them to the past.

Maeda Ai discusses the historical urban planning in Asakusa. Asakusa was divided into certain districts, and within each district there was an ongoing flow of various activities and cultures. For example, the Sixth District, known as Rokku, was the famous entertainment district, hosting all kinds of shows and exhibits (Maeda 149). By examining the overall layout of this part of Asakusa, one is able to notice that Asakusa had already been deeply imbricated with imputed foreign culture since earlier decades, which were then integrated into both the physical and sensational aspect of the conventional, yet continually updating the appearance of Asakusa. One piece of evidence of this material integration is the physical buildings of the area. The buildings were constructed not only to fulfill fundamental purposes as houses for residence and business, but also displayed themselves as a concrete representation of the modern. Maeda traces how this modern new-born culture is visible when one pays careful attention to the construction of the buildings. Here is how he described the concrete used in building the area:

From early on, Asakusa as an amusement quarter was usually fixated on various “worlds.” The Junikai [the Twelve Stories], for example, was in fact a clumsy

copy of the hugely popular Eiffel Tower that was built for the Paris Exhibition, and the Panorama Hall, which opened in the same year (1890), displayed phantom-like scenes from the Battle of Gettysburg to the accompaniment of a music box. From the Chinsekai [“strange world”], a theater erected next to the Panorama Hall, to the Shinsekai [“new world”], an utterly tasteless clump of box-shaped buildings thrown up after the war on the site of Gourd Pond, Asakusa has seemed preoccupied with building models of worlds or universes. Needless to say, this preoccupation has been the well-spring of Asakusa’s appeal (Maeda 150).

This “various worlds” image that Asakusa has presented to the outside suggests Asakusa’s ability to indiscriminately and diversely absorb foreign cultures. Yet, the new cultural atmosphere of many “worlds” created in the midst of these new Western buildings within the Asakusa region does not seem to possess stability in terms of its manipulation to the original culture. In one section, the narrator brings in an image of the houses laid out around an area where the Asakusa and Matsukiyo streets intersect, “The Yamabun Inn. The second floor of this shabby Japanese building stands right up against a Western inn” (Kawabata 122). Like how the Junikai can be seen as a copy of the Eiffel Tower of France, how the Panorama Hall can be seen as an exhibition of the scenes from the Battle of Gettysburg, there is a sense of incompatibility between the established since the past and the new, as foreign culture is simply laid on top of the older layers of culture instead of mixing and becoming a unified one. Here, it is Lippit’s idea of the “sense of spectrality” that comes to attention (Lippit 138).

Lippit cites the critic Kobayashi Hideo’s remark of the “dreamlike” qualities of an urban city, where the various traces of the modern, such as the use of machines, evoke a sensation that makes one feel unreal and numb about one’s being in the city. In relation to the psychological effects of modernity, Lippit instead comes up with the idea so called the “sense of spectrality,” which can be defined within the Asakusa context as “the disjunction between the surface

phenomena and the historical context,—this doubleness is materialized as anachronistic images and artifacts of past culture” (Lippit 138). This “disjunction” creates a notable gap in perception of cultural flow, which gradually separates and alienates people living in the city. Under these circumstances, what seems to be happening is that the old past is being modified in a way that while the core content may not get changed, the presentation of the past is made to no longer own the taste of its originality. While there are still aspects of the past that are effectively preserved, what is being highlighted is the loss of the presence of the past, leading to the experience of seeing and so sensing the past as a “vanishing” figure (Lippit 139).

As the readers follow the point of view of the narrator of *Asakusa Kurenaidan*, it is evident that materials generated from the past are still visible in a way associated with sentimental nostalgia. For example, the narrator observes that by looking closely at the show stalls at the Hanayashiki amusement park, “[one] can find nostalgic things like marionettes, acrobatic birds, and lifelike dolls that vaguely remind you of the days when the chrysanthemum dolls by the famous doll maker Yasumoto Kihachi were at the peak of their popularity” (Kawataba 154). These traditions still remain well preserved in some aspects, and not completely wiped out. There are even people who are willing to take into the responsibility of preserving the past: “Since it would be regrettable if the memory of the moon over the Saji Plain, whose shadows have now ceased, were to be lost to posterity, I have decided to erect this stone monument” (Kawabata 81). However, there are also changes that cannot be brought back, as the narrator opens up the conversation with his readers at the beginning, that the “musical instrument that blends the typewriter and the piano—we all know it as the ‘Taisho koto,’ but now some enterprising shopkeepers are calling it the ‘Showa koto.’ That’s how it is these days. Just no

nostalgia for old Edo” (Kawabata 4). Though the name has changed from “Taisho” to “Showa,” and transitioned into a new era, the object itself does not change. This could be a commercial strategy for the sale of products by the shopkeepers to make it sound new and fresh, but it also demonstrates how the past can be easily passed over and discarded, with its presence gradually erased first from sight, then from people’s minds.

Another example is *manzai* comedy. The narrator starts with a question and asks, “dear reader, have you listened to *manzai* lately? *Manzai* used to be funny. But in 1929, because the *manzai* people have been pushed by the ‘modern,’ by that wild, reckless nonsense straight from America, they have become pathetic clowns in both senses of the word” (Kawabata 93). The influence of Western popular culture is an input part of the changing culture of Asakusa. With theaters, cinemas, and restaurants widely constructed, Asakusa evidenced the prosperity resulting from the mixture of Western and Japanese local culture. However, some of the traces of the Japanese traditional culture seem to have been modified as a result of being “modern,” in which the characteristics that make traditions traditional are turned into something that might not be as appreciated as the way it used to be. The use of words like “nonsense” and “pathetic” create a feeling of pity and sadness from Kawabata who values the traditional and realizes that some values are being lost along with rapid changes.

These rapid changes not only influence how Asakusa presents itself to the outsider, but the place's fluidity permeates into people’s mind as well as the remembering of the building also, generally changing the image of the past in people’s memory. For instance, “... there would probably be lots of people who would forget to include this [famous garden at the Denpoin designed by Kobori Enshu], which is rumored to open to the public on April 1, 1930. But nobody

could forget the concrete Kototoi Bridge or the concrete Sumida Park” (Kawabata 95). Ironically, people only remember the newly constructed buildings instead of the famous classic garden built years ago as a symbolic site in Asakusa, as if people are newborn and thus never visited the garden from the narrator’s observation. The fragmented details are due to the lack of the acknowledgement of the past. The building, the products, the symbols of tradition are so accessible, but at the same time are not being recognized. People live here, and work together to build the prosperity of this place, but this sense of loss of attachment between themselves and the space prevents them from creating an essential sense of belonging.

This loss of sense of belonging can be elaborated by the depiction of the scene where a group of kids clean the public toilets demonstrates a great contrast between the public and private space. Once witnessed, this behavior of the kids raises the narrator’s curiosity of the intention behind this earnest effort. He then interviews a few nannies and gets back the saying “because [cleaning the toilet] makes them proud” as the answer. He is not satisfied with the nannies’ answer, and rather thinks that “the fact that the kids love this toilet, doesn’t it have something to do with the charm of concrete?... don’t the kids do it because of the charm of the modern building? Don’t the kids love the concrete bathroom more than the teahouse of the Momoyama Castle?” (Kawabata 95). Needless to say, the concrete is one of the most common building materials in modern society, and hence it functions here as a symbol of modernity. From the narrator’s consecutive rhetorical questions, the pure obsession of the concrete by the young juveniles indicates that fondness of the bathroom is not only an obsession of the modern, but the bathroom itself has become their private space for creating mutual belonging. The toilet is supposedly a place that is subjective to personal privacy. However, the children do not own a

toilet in their home. As something that appears to be “fancy” and new, they preoccupy it as their personal space, though it is in fact public in a park. As a private space for the kids, the toilet would eventually be shared and taken over by others who engage with the toilet the same way as they do. The exchange of roles between public space and private space appears in other parts of the section too, such as the homeless people occupying the park as their shelter. This exchange of places says something about the construction of the modern, in which it is not secure and permanent enough to be a 居場所 (*ibasho*)—a place that one belongs—tends to be shifting around and can be concerning. By giving us a thorough depiction of Asakusa, Kawabata wants to show not only the diversity of the place in terms of the residents, culture, and physical urban planning, but also the loss, sadness, and disgrace that is hidden behind this diversity.

### *The Restlessness of the Younger Generation*

Another major focus of *Asakusa Kurenaidan* are the characters who belong to the titular Scarlet Gang. As the title suggests, the story is primarily oriented around the activities of the gang members, such as Haruko and the iconic figure Yumiko. The story begins with the narrator going to meet with other gang members, since he is asked to write a play for them who think of themselves as “a theatrical group and harbors hopes of staging something spectacular” and want to amaze people with “displays of outlandish and unexpected originality” (Kawabata 8). While these extraordinary young men and women maintain aggressive attitudes reflected in their ways of thinking and behavior, Kawabata draws out descriptions of other juveniles who initiate all kinds of chaotic and problematic misconduct. For this section, I will demonstrate some of the

social problems that influence the behavior of the youths. Accommodating the restlessness of the younger generation, Kawabata shows that by the dynamism of these teenagers as the generation of the modern, Asakusa is able to thrive.

In the historical context, a dramatic contrast is discovered between the national education system which was implemented with, and the juvenile's behavior as of appears in Kawabata's writing. According to Maeda, during the Meiji period, juvenile literature promoted the virtues of self-refinement and diligence, trying to embed in the children's mind the awareness of themselves being the future generation. One example is Samuel Smiles' *Self-Help* which was translated and introduced to Japan in 1870. It turned out to be extremely popular as being the "Meiji's best selling book," striking a call for personal advancement (*risshin shusse*). Gradually it helped generate an ideal of "young people diligently struggling to succeed in the world of *risshin shusse*," expecting them to apply utilitarianism and dedicate themselves to the pursuit of knowledge and learning good conducts. This mode of natiaonalistic education put a significant amount of emphasis on cultivating a strong future generation, making each child the subject of the emperor (Maeda 110-111). While school was made mandatory for six years of study, the young adolescents in Asakusa did not seem to fit into the ideal picture of an industrious student, but rather a juvenile who had prematurely entered the world of adulthood and struggled on the street instead of on school work.

Asakusa is a place that contains various groups that live in the margin of society. These young adolescents are one such group, coping with issues of poverty, lack of family care, and the transition from childhood to adulthood. Throughout the story, Kawabata makes the gang of teenagers stand out in the scene by sketching out the traces of their activities and news that are

being updated daily. For example, there comes a girl who “[has] been arrested, taken to the Kisakata Police Station over ten times, escaped from reform school seven times, been hanging out in the park for seven years since she was ten” (Kawabata 19). Here is another boy who is “well versed in the way of juvenile law... He had been dragged to the police station some twenty times and even sent to that prison on Iojima, but he spoke firmly before the public prosecutor each time: I won’t go straight until I’m fifteen,” yet does not seem to “know how to pile up cushions or to fold and put away the bedding... He’d never before used such things,” which is quite shocking (Kawabata 43). The boy, when being asked about the situation of his parents, barely answers, “I don’t have any parents yet” (Kawabata 44). As Miriam Silverberg notes, “not only are they ignorant of the everyday practices of organizing a household, they have no sense of piety or ancestry as encoded in the morals textbooks” (Silverberg 219). The lack of the conception of the presence of a family hinders how these youth grow up and conduct themselves, as there is no one close enough to support and help them be cultivated and inculcated with mores. Even if parents are present, the circumstances have made it extremely difficult for supervising. For instance, the boy Tokikō goes to school by boat, and his father can only accompany him up to the Kototoi Bridge. “But because the barge works on the Okawa, he can’t always be on time when school lets out. So Toki has to hang around in Asakusa until he is picked up that night, or even the next morning. In such a manner did Toki become one of the children of the park” (Kawabata 17). Like Tokikō, many other children are often left over being unsupervised as their parents have to work for long hours or in a far location. As a consequence they grow up wild children, wandering around with other kids and learning back the street culture. There are no close parallels to Meiji’s ideals and the juvenile’s daily routines, because

the daily routines reflect the despairing living conditions after the Great Depression. The “rebellious” performance of these young adolescents alternatively serves as a great source of energy that awakens the pervading depressive atmosphere in society. As Silverberg quotes Kawabata, ““Even though it’s delinquent, this youth expresses love and respect, has vigor, has progress,”” the presence of the juvenile delinquent seems to be necessary as they are critical to the recovery and future growth of Asakusa (Silverberg 219).

### *Analysis on the Character of Yumiko*

One of the remarkable highlights of *Asakusa Kurenaidan* is the charm of the attractive teenager Yumiko, who leads the narrator to streets and places hidden behind the glamorous Asakusa, and who directs a deadly love revenge on a young man named Akagi. Her characteristics have ignited ardent discussions amongst scholars. As a reader, I likewise direct my gaze at her everytime she appears in a scene. She appears for the first time as a piano girl in an elegant red dress in an alley, in which “the bright red stands out against the black of the piano, and the white of her legs, bare from knees down to feet, is young, fresh,” astonished the narrator (Kawabata 10). As a character, her beauty makes her a nearly perfect object for enjoyable gaze by others; as a person, her words and conduct present her as mysterious, delicate but poignant. Furthermore, the complexity of Yumiko’s figure also lays on her changing appearance and her own complex gender identity which involves a certain degree of ambiguity. Kawabata dedicates much of the first half of the book to Yumiko, where she gets dismissed after her revenge on a boy called Asagi who had seduced her sister and later abandoned her during the Great Earthquake,

with a climax scene of the arsenic kiss, and eventually returns back as a oil peddler at the end. The following section of this chapter will examine the double nature of Yumiko's character in which she exists as both the representation of the fluidity of Asakusa and the representation of a certain group of people who share complex experiences and feelings in regard to gender and sexuality.

The fact that Yumiko is a professional at disguise implies a playfulness and uncertainty when it comes to defining her character. She is the piano girl, the pretty boy on the bike, a ticket taker, and a peddler for hair oil. She claims that, "A braided wig is the best way for no one to know who I am. When I meet a man who is better behaved (not at all like you), then I become like a girl in braids. But okay, I'll do what you want" (Kawabata 35), indicating that she has the control and flexibility to manipulate herself as to how she wants to appear in the public, strategically becoming a spectacle of others. This bold feature of Yumiko resonates with how Asakusa presents itself as a constantly changing kaleidoscope, recreating and reproducing the essence of modernity while exploiting itself as part of the constantly updating process as well. The physicality of her body, in addition, is depicted as seductive and irresistible, just as how the space of Asakusa allures both people who reside there and come to visit from outside. In a scene right before the arsenic murder takes place, as Asagi arrives at the boat where Yumiko is supposed to be waiting for him, he sees that "her short hair disheveled, her forehead like a child's; her eyelashes, her lips stand out from her face, each like a living thing in itself. Her deep red skirt has slipped above her knees. She is not wearing stockings. Those bare feet are perfected parallel soles like pink shell work, her face turned toward the ceiling. The charcoal fire in the clay stove softly illuminates her feet, her sleeping figure" (Kawabata 39). Like a sleeping beauty

doll, the exposure of her body unguards the observer and lures him into the realm of erotic desire. The image of Yumiko parallels the operation and cultural flow that take place in Asakusa, where “eroticism and nonsense and speed” dominate this polytropic urban space.

While the presence of Yumiko appears as a captivating spectacle, what seems to be more interesting to Kawabata is the use of this character to explore questions related to gender identity and the traumatized experience during the Great Earthquake. Before the Meiji period, girls and boys were collectively referred to *shōnen*, which means “young boys” in the contemporary vernacular definition. There was no clear distinction between young female and male, neither the concept of *shōjo*, meaning girlhood, came into people’s recognition until the later half of the Meiji period. In the period when Kawabata drafted *Asakusa Kurenaidan*, the concept of *shōjo* was still a new and strange idea to be considered, and even the girls themselves experienced a sense of alienation, uncomfortable of being referred to as *shōjo*. Akiko, who is indeed Yumiko in her cross-dressing boy costume, confuses the narrator when he first sees her as the twin brother of Yumiko. The narrator describes, “He is wearing his flat cloth hunting cap backward, has on filthy corduroy trousers, and his face is truly dirty. Only his ears are clean, as lovely as carved mother-of-pearl. Those ears and those surprised eyes turned toward me, and these must have made me blush” (Kawabata 13). It is a masculine outfit from the first glance, yet the typical physicality of a female leaks out and hence adds a layer of sexiness at the boy. “He walks quickly, the fingers of both hands locked around the back of his neck, as if trying to hide its smoothness, his cheeks buried in both elbows” (Kawabata 21). Here, Yumiko is making an effort to conceal the shyness and her female characteristics from the narrator. While Yumiko is being herself, she claims “I’m not a woman,” as a defense for her sovereignty of living and acting as a

female. The femininity of her boyish appearance and the masculinity of her girlish appearance evoke a certain degree of confusion in the reader, also the confusion and uncertainty of Yumiko herself—as other young girls at that time—feelings about their gender identity in contrast to traditional definitions of gender still circulates.

This uncertainty over gender also gets shaken by witnessing how her sister falls in love with Asagi, discarded carelessly, and eventually becomes a mad woman in the end. While acknowledging the whole love scenario of her sister and deciding to take revenge for her, Yumiko also falls into the trap of love for Asagi. She has contradictory feelings, as on one hand she refuses to be in a position of being taken for pleasure, saying “I’m not a woman. Looking at my sister, I vowed as a child that I’d never become a woman. Besides, men don’t have any guts, do they? Not one of them has ever made me a woman,” and on the other hand, she yields some passion of love toward the appealing playboy Asagi (Kawabata 31). But she knows this passion will not reach the stage of a pure romantic relationship with him as long as she still possesses the memory of the Earthquake. Yumiko recalls her reminiscence as a survivor of the Earthquake when confronting Asagi on the boat, expressing how challenging it was as such an obstacle for people around to get over loss and destruction. She and her sister and other survivors come together and reconstruct a school as a temporary shelter: “We were as happy as could be, but, if the world were to fall apart again, I wonder if we’d pour our hearts into putting it back together like we did then. But my sister got lonelier once school started. When she heard the voices reading from textbooks, the singing of songs, and the chants during gym class exercises, she would look up from the second-floor window, tears running down her cheeks” (Kawabata 73). Not only Yumiko’s sister is a victim in this natural disaster and love disaster, Yumiko also finds

herself struggling to get over the traumatic destruction caused by the earthquake, as well as her sister's mental instability. She is a character meant to contain those memories, representing the everlasting pain that gets carried along to the present.

### *Conclusion*

In this chapter, I have discussed how the concept of loss of attachment is revealed through Kawabata's portrayal of the vigorous and restless neighborhood of Asakusa. We have seen how the body of the dancing girls is commercialized and becomes an object for gaze, and how the gaze from the audience in like manner turns the body of the audience into a part of the spectacle phenomenon as well, leading to a loss of control on their own body for both groups. Integrated with Lippit and Maeda's ideas, the examination on how mass culture has transitioned from the past to the modern is made more explicit as we trace how traditions are being recreated and reconstructed within the context of the modern. People have lost the acknowledgement of the past, and failed to capture the sense of "nostalgia," while interacting with the objects from the past. Our attention cannot refrain from the fidgety youths. The majority of the novel is written according to the routines of the members of the Scarlet Gang. Their aggressive attitudes and actions challenge what is considered as ordinary, giving Asakusa energy and vigor but at the same time, reflecting the life of the marginalized youth. Among them, the most outstanding character Yumiko, who acts as an epitome of the mysterious alluring Asakusa, and provides us with a unique perspective on gender identity and the traumatic memory of the Earthquake. The ambiguity of the Yumiko character conveys a sense of alienation that can perplex day to day

experience. Indeed, not only Yumiko but all the characters in the book—the dancing girls, the playboys, the Gang members, the beggars in the park—share this estranged sensation alienated along with the pleasurable consumption of modern eroticism by, as they struggle hard to find or create a sense of belonging in this place. Beauty is appreciated but the grotesque side of Asakusa also fascinates Kawabata. As it still is today, Asakusa of the novel is a place that embraces diverse cultures and attracts foreigners from all over the world. In this chapter, I have demonstrated some of the aspects of how one urban space and the people involved in it have undergone tremendous transformations through the experience of the modern; which may still resonate with our experience of the contemporary period.

## Chapter 2 Akutagawa and His Literary Struggle

When I first read Akutagawa Ryūnosuke's story "Haguruma" ("Spinning Gears", 1927), I was astonished by its narrative and traumatic scenes, and at the same time wondered what experience triggered such a victim. Knowing that it was a posthumous manuscript of Akutagawa's, and that his suicide was achieved to what he called the feeling of "vague anxiety," I could not stop thinking about the reason behind his death. Seiji Lippit describes as "the defeat of literature," which seems to be about Akutagawa's inability to overcome his disquieting feeling through literature, but also a sign of the intractable problems of the practice of modern literature as such. Compared to Akutagawa's earlier writings, which primarily employ different historical events and cultures, and rewrite classical works across different time periods, one can observe changes in his style of narrative and themes in his late writings, which is largely based on his own life.

As a close reading two of Akutagawa's late writings, "Haguruma" and "Aru ahō no isshō", ("The Life of A Stupid Man", 1927), this chapter will be broken down into three sections. The first section focuses on the inner conflicts occurring between foreign languages and literatures. In "Haguruma," the narrator encounters a mixture of imagery associated with English and French languages as literatures, which evokes a sense of instability with his mental perception of objects and people and even renders a loss of proper verbal expression in his native language (*bogo*). I then analyze each title appearing in the text, investigating how the reading experience of the narrator, who attempts to extract himself from the trivial and seek refuge in the realm of literature, further hinders his desire to put rest to his unease and anxiety. The second

section touches upon the practice and presence of literature as a commodity. It starts by introducing a brief history of Maruzen, Japan's most famous modern bookstore and a crucial place for the study and import of Western and other foreign cultures. Maruzen operated not merely as a bookstore, but more importantly as a center where intellectuals acquired knowledge and interaction with ideas that were at once alienating yet profoundly influential on their writing. The physical structure of Maruzen as a work of modern architecture with bricks and glass created a space of modernity and its unique atmosphere acutely mystified the rationality of its visitors. We are able to see how Akutagawa struggled within the challenging dimensions of reading and writing as a writer under contract and working for publishers, dealing with monetary matters, and the economics of literary production. Last but not least, the third section delves into Akutagawa's physical and mental illness and its relation to his literature. Besides the countless diagnoses afflicting his physical body, Akutagawa also endured fear and anxiety regarding his biological mother's insanity that had rooted in his head for a long period of time. We will also witness how the modern urban experience had generated diverse stimuli that were all taken as deadly portents indicating his own breakdown. I explore the notion of literature being a double edged sword of cure and poison at the same time, and study how Akutagawa endeavored to free himself from the confinement of literature and the possibility to break through the painful experience that had depressed his sensory perception and mental stability within his literature. We will examine the collapse of Akutagawa's ideal world of mutual balance between art and life, literature and modern culture, by looking at the changes in the form of his literary practice, his consciousness, and his engagement with literature as a commodity, which inevitably lead to his inability to reconcile his internal tensions in his last stage of life as a writer.

*The Interruption of Foreign Languages and Literature*

The formation of Japanese culture is unique in a way, as Seiji M. Lippit points out, in that it is due to “the absence of an originary culture, combined with a limitless capacity for assimilation” (Lippit 63). This distinct quality makes the idea of universality of literature seem achievable. In “Haguruma,” there is an active engagement with foreign culture. For example, the conversation between the narrator and his friend T, when waiting on the train platform, attends to the foreign news: “We talked about Mme. Cailaux’s shooting of the owner of *Le Figaro*, about crab cuisine, about an Imperial Prince who was traveling abroad...” (Akutagawa 208). Then the narrator and his friend go on talking as they see a woman on the platform and describe her as a “woman with Western hairdo, wearing chic Western clothing (Akutagawa 208). A wedding, the narrator interacts with a Chinese scholar, discussing Chinese writing with him, ““The *kirin* is, finally, a kind of unicorn,’ I said. And the *hōō* corresponds to the Western phoenix” (Akutagawa 209). Not only can traces of foreignness be seen, but Akutagawa also employs close interaction with foreign languages, particularly with English and French, in the text. Yet, this engagement does not seem to mean a unified assimilation with the Japanese language. It is at this moment in the wedding that the interruption of the linguistic occurs when the narrator sees a maggot in his plate of meat, and it “called to mind the English word ‘Worm’” (Akutagawa 210). In the Japanese text, it is worth noticing that the word “worm” is kept in its English original script: “蛆は僕の頭の中に Worm と云う英語を呼び起した。” The actual image of a worm would be disturbing enough, but what makes the text more disturbing is how the English language interrupts readers' flow of the Japanese language that has kept constant until this point. If one understands the English, one would be given a more concrete and gruesome feeling towards the

image of a worm in a plate of meat; if one does not know the English, one would be stuck by the English meaning. In the next scene where the narrator hears the word “all right” in English as he returns back to his room, and he cannot get himself away from repeating the word when writing, “And when at last it did, it just kept writing the same words over and over: ‘All right... All right... All right, Sir... All right...’” (Akutagawa 211). Surprisingly the original text also preserves the English, “のみならずやっと動いたと思うと、同じ言葉ばかり書きつづけていた。All right.....All right.....All right sir.....All right.....” The association of foreign language generates interruption in one's flow of thinking, at the same time because it is so transmittable between languages that often it triggers more anxiety that is indescribable. In the text, one can observe how the narrator just relates a word so naturally to another language is actually giving himself another self interpretation that worsens his mental condition, when he “recast ‘mole’ as the French word ‘la mort.’ (Mole を la mort に綴り直した) ‘Death’: with that came a new rush of anxiety,” (Akutagawa 225). Countering the concept of universality of literature, the text provides numerous vivid examples of situations which indicate a struggle encountered not only by the readers of the text, but by the writer who tried hard to maintain this capacity of literature yet found it fragile enough to break.

The anxiety resulting in this struggle of discovering the vulnerability of literature is escalated when the narrator seems to lose the ability of expression in his native language. When he is talking with a high-school friend of his, he finds it troubling: “‘You’re right, the Shu Shun... (あのシュンシュン.....)’ I could not seem to pronounce the name ‘Shu Shunsui’ properly. I found this disconcerting: it was Japanese, after all, not some foreign language” (Akutagawa 224). The same thing happens when he himself is “unable to pronounce the word ‘insomnia (「不

眠症」のシヨウの発音)”” (Akutagawa 224). This inability is profound as it serves as a clear indication of the narrator's failure to incorporate both his native language and the foreign languages he has studied. This contrast signifies how the assumed universality of literature is not permanent and can be easily destroyed just as how the languages of English and French interrupt the native language of Japanese, which seems to be as threatening to Akutagawa as to the narrator.

Moreover, looking through the books that Akutagawa included in the text is important to understand how his experience with reading foreign literature did not offer him a remedy but rather a sword stabbing the wounds in his mind. In section two “Vengeance,” the narrator is stuck in writing and decides to read “Polikushka” by Leo Tolstoy. Centered around peasant Polikushka, the story is about a vain man who is charged to bring money back from the city for a wealthy family. On his way back he worries about losing the money envelope and hence hides the envelope inside his hat. However he loses it as the hat falls out when he is sleeping. He tries but can not find the envelope and eventually hangs himself. As the narrator claims, “[a] few small revisions to the tragicomedy of his life, though, and you could end up with a caricature of my own life”, here it draws the implication that the ending seems to be inescapable for Polikushka’s character and his attempt to change his life and social status, as there is an invisible force which described by the narrator as a sense of “sneer of Fate”, that Polikushka is bound to, which resonates with how the narrator feels himself being bound to as well (Akutagawa 213). In addition, in section three “Night”, as the narrator glances through books on the second floor at Maruzen, he recalls his old pen name Juryo Yoshi, who is referred to as “The Young Man of Shou Ling,” (Akutagawa 218). It comes from a Chinese story by Zhuangzi, where a young man

of Shou Ling goes to Handan to study the beautiful walking style practiced there, however at the end he has to crawl back home because he forgets how to walk properly in the original walking style. The story suggests how blind imitation does not benefit but instead demolishes one's originality and the acquired skills. Though it is not necessarily associated with imitation in the story, the nature of the story presents a resonance to the narrator's own reference to his inability to pronounce his native language and the experience of being psychologically disrupted by foreign languages. Hence recollection of the story does not ease but despair him, "To think that I had used this pen name long before I ever fell into my present hell!" (Akutagawa 218). Another Chinese story by Zhuangzi is also mentioned here, which is about a man called Zhu Pengman spending three years studying the art of slaughtering dragons. Nevertheless this all ends up being useless because there are no dragons to be killed. It is a metaphor implying that a skill without its practicality is nonetheless worthless. The narrator reminds himself as he connects the subject "dragon" to his name "dragon" after sighting a poster of St. George figure, in which this tripartite of the West, the East, and the narrator himself demonstrates to certain extent the relationship Akutagawa holds with the West and East and his inner struggle of finding peace with these foreign literatures.

There is a time when the narrator is successful in settling down his anxiety and seeking power for living from *Conversations with Anatole France* by Nicolas Segur and *The Collected Letters of Prosper Mérimée* by Prosper Mérimée. In particular, Mérimée's letters give great encouragement to the narrator as he finds out that "[the] writer filled his letters with the same kind of pithy aphorisms that lent spark to his novels. Soon these aphorisms helped to steel my nerves," (Akutagawa 223). Later on he then figures out that the authors of these two works all

committed to religion, “When I learned, however, that the author had become a Protestant at the end of his life, I felt as if I were seeing the face behind the mask for the first time... To forget my melancholy, I started to read *Conversations with Anatole France*, but this modern Pan, too, was another man who bore a cross...” (Akutagawa 229). What is problematic here is not that Segur and Mérimée become a religious prayer; rather this commitment disproves the aphorisms and statements that have supported the narrator, maybe even the authors themselves as they were written out when they were younger. The commitment to religion delivers a message of hopelessness to the narrator, as even the power of words no longer has effect, and only by relying on other sources can one rescue the spirit from the desperation of life. Of all these literary texts Akutagawa includes in “Haguruma,” it is evident to recognize the mental torment from reading literature, as these texts propose nothing positive, only miserable endings for the characters, offering no resolutions to their tragic lives and futile efforts. As the narrator draws connection to these texts as a reflection of his life, it is not hard to discover that beyond these books, there are only inauspicious insinuations and discouragement regarding Akutagawa’s inability to change his own condition and avoid self-destruction. The reading experience of foreign literary texts also hints at the limits of literature for Akutagawa, as it seems these texts were all written in a mode and nature of writing that was set to be commercial.

### *“Maruzen” and the Commercialization of Literature*

In addition to the disintegration of foreign cultures and languages, the ways in which literature has become a comedy product is another intriguing aspect for discussion. Strangely

enough, the bookstore seems to be the center for Akutagawa's activity; in these two stories he the narrator appears in a bookstore more often than in any other location. The bookstore Maruzen particularly played an important role in Akutagawa's life and his understanding of Western and world literatures. Founded in 1869, Maruzen was a premier retailer of foreign literature in Japan around that time. According to Nathan Shockey, Western books sold at Maruzen were "media that heralded new forms of knowledge," as they included copies of textbooks and encyclopedias produced from other countries (Shockey 95). On one hand, Maruzen was a rich cabinet consisting of innovative ideas and creative inspirations, a commercial and enlightened center for intellectuals to explore. On the other hand, as Shockey points out, Maruzen operated as "a place to seek immersion in a new media environment made up of strange and novel objects, and writings on Maruzen rarely mention something so mundane as purchasing a book" (Shockey 96). This perplexing image of Maruzen can be clearly seen as a cause of disorientation for Akutagawa's mental health condition. This section will explore the commodification of literature and practice of literature embodied through Maruzen, and how Maruzen acted as a space that functioned as both a cure and an affliction for Akutagawa.

In his posthumous semi-autobiographical writing "Aru ahō no isshō", ("The Life of A Stupid Man", 1927), the narrator goes to Maruzen in his twenties, opening up as the first episode named "The Era": "He was upstairs in a bookstore. Twenty years old at the time, he had climbed a ladder set against a bookcase and was searching for the newly-arrived Western books: Maupassant, Baudelaire, Strindberg, Ibsen, Shaw, Tolstoy..." (Akutagawa 186). The Maruzen bookstore was where the narrator makes his approach to learning and exploring Western literature of all kinds. He then goes on to describe a profound moment when he noticed that

“directly overhead, a single bare light bulb came on. Standing on his perch on top of the ladder, he looked down at the clerks and customers moving among the books. They were strangely small—and shabby” (Akutagawa 187). The image of a light bulb shining over his head, which draws a contrast to the people downstairs where the area seems to be relatively dim and not being covered by light, entails a special moment when the narrator realizes an “enlightened” experience of forming a insight world of literature that distinguishes himself from the mundane. By visiting the bookstore, Akutagawa and the narrator build up not only their own perception of the nature of literature but also of life and material objects of the world. There is a scene where the narrator is “standing outside a bookstore, looking at a Van Gogh volume, when he suddenly understands what a ‘picture’ was,” and from that he senses “the vivid presence of nature,” recognizing that “[t]his passion for pictures gave him a whole new way of looking at the world” (Akutagawa 189). The bookstore and Maruzen in particular, functions as a hub where Akutagawa expands and develops his own cognition and consciousness of the world through the practice of literature. There is a sense of pride and supremacy where the narrator looks down the stairs and finds people are “small” and “shabby.” The difference in the position between the narrator upstairs and the other customers and staff downstairs draws a line that separates the two not only physically but inwardly and spiritually as well. The presence of Maruzen undoubtedly had a great impact on Akutagawa’s understanding of literature, and yet his later writings depict a breakdown of the ideal image that had formed through Maruzen for so long in Akutagawa’s insight.

Akutagawa believed, as Lippit explains, that “literature organized a consciousness of modern culture and framed his own relation to the West; literature provided access to a world of

‘universality.’ It is this ideology of literary practice, its capacity to organize a consciousness of a universal modern culture, that disintegrates in his late writings,” (Lippit 53). For Akutagawa, this “universality” of literature should allow both Western and Japanese culture to merge together, eliminating the gap generated by the scope of language. The “universality” was also expected to help constitute one’s understanding and perception of a culture under the context of modernity. Nonetheless, it is evident in his late writings that Akutagawa’s belief in the universal nature of literature started to fall apart and eventually failed. One aspect that led to the breakdown of this notion of universality is the commercialization of literature. Along with the development of a modern consumerist society, publication of literature had been commodified in a way that it had become the major source of income for writers. Akutagawa was by all means one of these writers. In fact, we can see that he indeed struggled with financial issues with writing, publication, and family; these are major themes in the story “Haguruma.”

From the narrator’s point of view, it is evident that there is a constant conversation going on between the publisher and the narrator about money. When he first arrives at the hotel room, the narrator immediately “telephoned a magazine publisher to talk about money” (Akutagawa 209). When he finishes writing a story, he decides to send the story to a publisher anyway even though he acknowledges that he “would not be paid enough for it to cover the bill for a week’s stay [in the hotel]” (Akutagawa 222). Towards the end at a point where he is desperate to go home, surprisingly he feels the need to “call a certain magazine publisher and, one way or another, arrange for some money” (Akutagawa 232). There seems to be an unbreakable connection between the narrator and publishers that even if the payment for writing remains low, the narrator still continues the business instead of quitting. Moreover, it also indicates that there

is an inability for the narrator to go beyond the rope which chains the practice of literature and the financial reality together, which has to do with family. After the wedding, the narrator receives a phone call from his sister saying that her husband had committed suicide by the train, and that their house burned down. Ironically, it seems to be a deliberate arson by the husband himself for insurance, and yet his sister gets very little compensation. The narrator then feels obligated to take care of his sister's family. This responsibility to his relatives, in addition to his own family, certainly adds burden to the narrator. As for Akutagawa, it is, "[t]o him at least, his future looked as gloomy as the end of the day" (Akutagawa 203), feeling powerless to depart from familial responsibility and business obligations with the contracted publishers. As how the narrator reflects every moment when he writes, he can not help but look at the snow outside the window, "Spread out beneath a budding daphne, the snow was soiled by the smoky air of the city; the view pained my heart," it is also a metaphor for Akutagawa's own condition of writing: he found himself being restrained within the realm of literature that had been constructed around with commercial and financial matters, as the snow being stained by the dusty air produced in the modern (Akutagawa 212).

There is another problem with which Akutagawa finds dislike with the matter of publication, which is the writing requests assigned by the publisher. There is a scene where the narrator is reading a packet of letters he receives in the hotel, and he then finds himself annoyed: "One was from a Leipzig publisher asking me to write an essay on the theme of 'The Modern Japanese Woman.' Why *me* of all people on a subject like that? The letter, in English, carried a handwritten P.S.: 'We should be most pleased if your portrait of the Japanese woman were done like a Japanese ink painting, entirely in black and white.' This reminded me of the Black and

White whiskey I had drunk earlier, and I ripped the letter to shreds” (Akutagawa 230). Here, the request for writing on a specific subject puts a limit on the extent to which literature can serve for intellectual idea expression. On one hand, this “The Modern Japanese Woman” does not come from the idea of the writer. It is an assigned theme, with consideration on business promotion or the purpose to attract readers, not a personally initiated idea of writing. It is meant to produce a piece for a specific group of target readers, at least some others who would be “pleased” reading it. On the other hand, the writing request sets up a fixed frame that there is merely space for creative production. The piece is not just about a subject being human but this subject has to be “modern,” “Japanese,” and “woman,” created in a style of “Japanese ink painting entirely in black and white.” If one were to look at Akutagawa’s early writings, one can discover the writer’s attempt to integrate different cultures and classical stories: “Rashōmon” (“Rashōmon”, 1915) sets in the stage of Heian Period, “Hana” (“The Nose”, 1916) and “Kumo no ito” (“The Spider Thread”, 1918) draw elements from the Buddhist religion, “Ryū” (“Dragon: The Old Potter’s Tale”, 1919) borrows the Chinese mythology of the dragon (*long*). What is more is that these criteria of the appointed subject do not fit into the narrator’s perception of modern Japanese women. The portrait of a modern Japanese woman in ink of black and white does not seem to make any sense, as if putting a lively human figure into a colorless and cold depiction. This does not align with the views of the narrator, who sees the Japanese women as more than just black-and-white. In this case, by the request of the publisher, it is nevertheless troublesome and destructive not only for the narrator but for Akutagawa as well, as it does not allow the capacity of literature to fully function; instead the appointed criteria restraints and reinforces a fixed image of an idea, in this case modern Japanese women.

There is a section of the text where the narrator talks about how he feels when someone calls him “Sensei,” “‘A-Sensei’: such titles of respect were the worst thing (*fukai na kotoba*) that anyone could use for me these days... But my materialism could only reject such mysticism. Just a few months earlier, I had written in a small coterie magazine: ‘I have no conscience at all—least of all an artistic conscience (*geijyutsu teki ryoushin*). All I have is nerves (*shinkei*)’” (Akutagawa 214). The narrator’s displeasure with the title “Sensei” indicates how he feels dissatisfied and unhappy about not only the nature of his practice as a writer driven by “*shinkei*,” which were pushed by domestic responsibility and financial necessity; additionally, the title “*shinkei*” is acting as a reminder of the limits of the present practice of literature and his own hopelessness in breaking these limits.

While he is feeling unease about the practice of writing literature, the narrator at once realizes the bookstore, where he considered as “a tonic for [his]weary soul,” was eventually a source of pain, like a mirror reflecting and enlarging his inner fear and anxiety (Akutagawa 222). In session two of the story “Vengeance,” as the narrator wanders around and enters a bookstore, he grabs a children book on Greek mythology, and reacts with shock, “The line I chanced to read, however, practically knocked me over: ‘Even the greatest of gods, Zeus himself, was no match for those gods of vengeance, the Furies’” (Akutagawa 217). This statement on the defeat of Zeus by the Furies, and his overreaction leads to a pessimistic feeling of self destruction. He had this delusion that he had done something wrong and as a consequence, something was going to get him punished at any moment. This might have to do with his inevitable involvement in commercial practice of writing and as well as his ambiguous and distressing relationship with a woman who he regarded as the “god of vengeance”. The defeat of Zeus by the gods of

vengeance seems to give him a foreshadowing as if he would be eventually defeated by the bounded nature of present literary practice and this toxic romantic relationship he was trapped into, where literature was motivating him and making him productive, at the same time destroying and eroding his mind. Therefore by reading this line, the narrator seems to take on a great load of pressure. The following passage provides a more striking encountering with Maruzen bookstore that illustrates the breakdown of the nerves of the narrator:

“I found a copy of Strindberg’s *Legends* on the second floor of Maruzen Books, and skimmed through it a few pages at a time. It described an experience that was not much different from my own. Not only that: it had a yellow cover. I put *Legends* back on the shelf and pulled down another thick volume almost at random, but it too had something for me: one of its illustrations showed rows of gears with human eyes and noses. (The book was a German editor’s compilation of pictures by mental patients.) In the midst of my depression I felt a spirit of defiance rising and I started opening book after book with the desperation of a compulsive gambler. Every single one of them, however, concealed some kind of needle to stab me, whether in the text or an illustration. Every single one? I picked up *Madame Bovary*, which I had read any number of times, only to sense that I myself was the bourgeois (*chousankaikyuu*) Monsieur Bovary” (Akutagawa, 217).

Starting with the reading of *Legends*, the reflection of “an experience that was not much different” implies a similarity that resonates the narrator’s feeling and struggling mentally with his incapability to write in a way that extends the current mode of practicing literature; a self reflection manifested here. The indication of its cover as yellow shows his anxiety about the color yellow, which he finds dangerous to approach such as a yellow taxi, yellow raincoat, whereas the green tends to be a safe color. The concrete illustration of the gears and human body enhances his fear and sickness with the gears that appear incoherently and block his visual field. In addition, the illustration is an illusion drawn by mental patients, which obliquely prompts the narrator to relate to his own eye sickness and struggles with mental illness. For Akutagawa, the

image of his mother going crazy had remained a shadow on his mind and for him that he was always frightened about inheriting insanity from his mother. The sense of “bourgeois,” which is a word associated with one’s social class, explores a reality that what had shaped Akutagawa’s own identity had always been a limited framework built up by the commercialized practice of literature that he realized later. In fact, the commodification of literature had never been changed even back in his twenties when he was climbing up the stairs and watching the “clerks and customers” in the first episode of *Aru ahō no isshō*, where the words “clerks” and “customers” already imply a fully commercialized system of operation.

#### *Medication and Mental Nerves*

As Akutagawa had struggled with the modern status and practice of literature, knowing that he had suffered from both physical and mental illness is essential in understanding his claim of that “vague anxiety” that caused his suicide and its relation to the urban space around him. In the texts “Haguruma” and “Aru ahō no isshō”, one would find it surprising to acknowledge the numerous types of diseases and the medical treatments with excessive use of drugs that taxed him harshly both physically and mentally. The narrator confesses a list of diagnoses he possessed: “gastric hyperacidity, gastric atony, dry pleurisy, neurasthenia, chronic conjunctivitis, brain fatigue” (Akutagawa 201). One of the most grievous and severe ones is insomnia, in which he would not be able to sleep without ingestion of more than one type of sleeping pills: “Veronal, Neuronal, Trional, Numal” (Akutagawa 215). The difficulty sleeping gave him such a pain that he was unable to control his own state of mind: “The only time his head ever cleared was after a

sleep induced by eight-tenths of a gram of Veronal and even then it never lasted more than thirty minutes or an hour” (Akutagawa 205). From the descriptions above, it is evident that under these diagnoses, his physical condition had become less sustainable over time, and that he had to endure both the illness and the pharmaceutical effects from medication. It seems that he had little control over his bodily condition but could only draw reliance on piles of pills to keep himself awake, calm, and functionable. Nevertheless, though taking medication provided ease to his ill condition to some extent, Akutagawa’s own obsession on his mother’s madness and his vision of himself and around which might be overinterpreted in his own adequately burdened his mind and will to live.

Akutagawa’s biological mother went through mental illness shortly after his birth, and he was thereafter taken care of by his uncle. Witnessing and acknowledging his mother’s condition, Akutagawa had yielded a deep, long-lasting apprehension of inheriting insanity from his mother. Throughout “Haguruma” he frequently reminds himself, whether consciously or not, of his own fear. The narrator at once is in conversation with an old man who lives in the attic of a Bible publishing house and consults him with his concern, “Why had my mother gone mad? Why had my father’s business failed? And why had I been punished?” (Akutagawa 226). The narrator is then afraid of confessing his own experience to the old man, worried that his own past “might go from him to my wife and children and I would end up like my mother in an insane asylum” (Akutagawa 227). One would observe that there is a tight connection between how Akutagawa considered his own being and his mother. He constantly feared the possibility of becoming insane, and yet realized that this familial kinship was not something he merely could get out of. He was thus highly sensitive to his own actions and the physical surrounding, so that his nerves

remained extremely careful and susceptible. As in the scene I mentioned earlier in this chapter, where the narrator encounters a friend of his and finds himself lost the ability of proper linguistic expression with words “*Shu Shunsui*” and “*fuminsyo*,” the narrator provides an explanation of his inability to articulate in his native language as there is “nothing new for the son of a madwoman” (Akutagawa 224). It was inevitable for him to think of this inability as a sign of insanity, though there did not seem to be a direct relationship within; the use of medication also could have potentially caused this sudden stammer. For a long time, the narrator’s mind has been sensitive to his interactions with other people, which caused him to feel a sense of alienation and contrast towards his body and mind. This being said, the narrator is able to use his experiences to describe Akutagawa’s source of anxiety. His notion of his mother and insanity, disrupting like a curse, haunted him with indescribable anxiety, essentially contributed to his own mental breakdown.

Along with the struggles within his body and mind, the many visual signs of the modern city further perplexed Akutagawa’s perception and sensations of the space around him. Illustrated through “Haguruma”, one sign is the appearance of different colors that acts as a great stimulus to the narrator’s inner anxiety. For example, yellow appears as a color in relation to danger and threat to him in all cases. When he sees a taxi in yellow, he refuses to take it because “[f]or some reason, the yellow taxis (*kiirotakushii*) [he] took were always having accidents,” (Akutagawa 216). In contrast with the color yellow as a threatening color, green is on the other hand a safe color for the narrator. When he finds a green (*midori no kuruma*) taxi eventually he feels “lucky”; once the dress of a woman is in green (*midori no doressu*) and he feels “a kind of salvation” (Akutagawa 216, 222). In addition, rose-colored (*barairo*) brings “a feeling

close to peace,” and red (*akai*) seems to be “sickening” (Akutagawa 219, 228). Another sign is the illusory image of a raincoat ghost. Since the narrator has heard the story from a taxi driver, the image of a raincoat ghost floats as it alive, frequently making its haunting appearance to the narrator: he sees a man with raincoat and has “an eerie feeling,”; he is not able to sit down to the sofa because there is a raincoat “dangling over the back,”; there is an occasion that his brother-in-law happened to wear a raincoat on the day he killed himself by a train, (Akutagawa 208, 210, 211). The appearance of the raincoat as a ghost is depressing to the narrator because ghosts are often associated as spiritual forms of the dead. Here, the narrator seems to be nervous about being chased by the raincoat ghost as if there was something, or someone, invisible and dreadful, approaching him. This feeling is further aggravated when he transverses through foreign languages. On a phone he hears “more” and relates “more” firstly to “mole”, then to French “la mort”: “I recast ‘mole’ as the French word ‘la mort.’ (“Mole を la mort に綴り直した”) ‘Death’: with that came a new rush of anxiety” (Akutagawa 225). He even witnesses “death” in reality in his home which is tangible, where “in the very center of this new path lay the rotting corpse of a mole, belly upward” (Akutagawa, 235). The flow of these visual representations, constantly shifting in between healing and alarming imagery, provokes the narrator to make ominous premonitions of death and punishment. Surrounded with signs that manifest self destruction and are continually produced and recreated, one is legitimate to understand that Akutagawa’s mental anxiety could have been further stimulated to a greater level.

The severe condition from both physical and mental illness is embodied by the image of spinning gears. Here is a description of the gears that appeared for the first time in “Haguruma”:

“I also realized that something strange had entered my field of vision—a set of translucent spinning gears. I had had this experience several times before, and it was always the same: the number of gears would gradually increase until half my field of vision was blocked” (Akutagawa 209). A gear, which is an industrial, modern, and mechanical product, is being integrated into the physical body as a type of eye illness, transparent and illusory. The three appearances of the gears: the first time is as the narrator walks alone “tall buildings” which reminds him of “pinewoods” (Akutagawa 209); the second time is when the narrator is having a sentimental resonance with the book *A Dark Night's Passing* (Akutagawa 221); the last gear is triggered at the witness of “a rotting corpse of a mole” (Akutagawa 235), symbolize respectively, the clash that Akutagawa experienced between modern and nature, between literature and the practice of literature, and collapse of tranquility within the mind. The gear, cropped to block the sight of the narrator, implies a sense of incompatibility between the internal consciousness and perception and what has actually been presented at the external world outside of the page. It is the ultimate consequence of Akutagawa’s defeat in negotiating literature, illness, writing, and modernity.

Akutagawa’s reference to the existence of a “second self” in “Haguruma” is a confusing notion as to how he understood his own subjectivity. In addition to his fear toward inherent insanity from his mother, it seems that he also found unease and conflict within his own mind. A scene where the narrator looks at the mirror and scrutinizes his own bodily reflection, then he senses the presence of his “second self”:

“As I stared at my image, I thought about my second self. Fortunately, I had never seen my second self—what the Germans call a Doppelgänger. The wife of my friend K, however, who had become an American film actor, had spotted my second self in the lobby of the Imperial Theatre. I recalled my confusion when she suddenly said to me, ‘Sorry I didn’t have a chance to speak with you the other night.’ And then there was the time a certain one-legged translator, now dead, saw

my second self in a Ginza tobacco shop. Maybe death was coming for my second self rather than me. And even if it did come for me—” (Akutagawa, 225).

Because it is by common knowledge that this is a piece related to the biography of Akutagawa’s real life and experience, I encountered some difficulty separating the narrator from Akutagawa the author when analyzing the above text. Yet, this concept of the “second self” is remarkably interesting, in that it alleviates the distinctions that I found blurry between the two personas. Lippit provides an explanation for this idea, interpreting it as: “express an anxiety of being imitated (or of imitating others), which, as the invocation of German in the quoted passage suggests, also involves an uneasy relationship to other cultures and other languages. At the same time, the double functions as a literal manifestation of a fragmented consciousness left in the wake of the disintegration of the universal space of literary practice” (Lippit 62). This statement is true to a point where this “double” contributes a sense of anxiety to the self, since this identity has been cultivated through the narrator’s contact with different cultures and languages through literature, yet it seems that the function of the “second self” can go even beyond this spectrum of internal self expression; it can also be understood as Akutagawa’s attempt to experiment and explore different literary possibilities in literature using his double identity which is only yielded under the circumstance of writing, either consciously or unconsciously.

From this passage, the “second self” stated here can possibly refer to the embedded narration within the story. On one hand, the narrator is Akutagawa because “he” is extracted from Akutagawa the writer; “he” carries over Akutagawa’s thinking, personality, and experience as a foundation for “his” character. On the other hand, “he” is not Akutagawa because “he” is meant to be created and used in the fictional literary world. “He” is part of Akutagawa as his

fictional identity in literature, but does not exist in reality. This approach can explain why the narrator clearly acknowledges the existence of this “second self” but never witnesses it himself. The “second self,” deviating from Akutagawa, serves him to explore the possibility of resolution for his own problems and mental distress. Due to his mother’s insanity and living with his aunt as an adopted child, Akutagawa cultivated an intensive sensibility that allowed him to be actively aware of people and social phenomena. From his writing, readers can perceive a sharp and critical tone implanted by the pen of the writer. This “second self” may have formed and appeared a long time back as a speaker to represent what Akutagawa had observed and discovered. Throughout the story, the narrator tries different attempts to seek settlement and closure when encountering disorder and anxiety within his body and mind as going to Maruzen but such a distorting space bewilders “him;” not able to write manuscripts, thus devoting “himself” to reading foreign literature and yet only finding melancholy resonance; going around the city and back home but panicking for the excessive amount of signs and premonitions. It seems to me that Akutagawa had also been trying hard to use this narration to search for any possibility within literature, to overcome the current bound status of literature, to depart from the established practice of writing and go beyond. The “second self” can also be the state in which Akutagawa becomes so devoted to writing that he turns into another alienated person, “In my savage joy, I felt as if I had no parents, no wife, no children, just the life that flowed forth from my pen” (Akutagawa 225). He enters into his writing such as that he unconsciously switched into his “second self”. This complexity of this “second self” manifests not only Akutagawa’s abilities and enthusiasm as a writer, but more profoundly his desire to escape from the long-lasting fear of

inheriting his mother's insanity, seeking hope and salvation for his mind and future through literary writing.

### *Conclusion*

In this chapter, we have delved into several important aspects of “Haguruma” and “Aru ahō no isshō,” as I have attempted to explore and understand the relationship between literature under the context of modernity and Akutagawa's mental breakdown. At the beginning, we examined how different foreign languages (German, French, English) have played an indispensable role in the narrator's life in structuring his perspective associations with material objects. The element of foreignness has also interrupted the linguistic expression of the narrator, causing the disability to properly pronounce certain words in Japanese. The reading of Western texts does not help but instead aggravates these “feelings” of anxiety and hopelessness as reflections of the narrator's real experience, giving the implication that even in the fictional, creative world of literature there is no way to break the “curse” of misery and illness. We have further seen the commercialization of literary material in publishing and writing, in which the production of literature is not only about writing as such, but complicated with monetary matters, writer's obligations to the contracts with the publishers, and family responsibilities. Akutagawa found himself starting with this practice of writing but ultimately being restricted within this sphere, in which he could not force his way out of. The bookstore Maruzen has been a profound site for numerous intellectuals; for Akutagawa it was a starting point where he opened up his authorial vision and knowledge of Western and other foreign cultures. However, as for other

writers, Maruzen functioned not merely as a place for book selling and purchasing, but rather a mysterious and bewildering space that transformed the mind of visitors. At last, we shift our attention to Akutagawa's personal, physical, and mental health conditions, witnessing how he had struggled with fear and anxiety from his mother's insanity, hallucinations produced under the modern setting, and the use of invisible "second self" to explore possibilities to ease his despair feeling and literary practice. Through this chapter, I have aimed to understand the anguish of Akutagawa, as he once claimed through the narrator in the text, that "I began to feel that anything and everything was a lie. Politics, business, art, science: all seemed just a mottled layer of enamel covering over this life in all its horror," provoking one's thinking on the invaluable significance of literature to one's being (Akutagawa 216).

## Chapter 3 Defining the Space of the Modern

In order to understand modernity, it is necessary to examine both the actual physical space and the perceptual space of an urban city. The urban metropolis it contains buildings such as skyscrapers, convenient transportation, factories, innovative technologies and machines. How does a city function? What is the relationship between the place and people who experience it? What does it mean to live in a so-called urban space? These are all questions to consider for not only the Japanese modern society that had been formed around the 1920s, but also for the global contemporary society we are living in, which has integrated diverse cultures. Even a modern city has always been changing, updating its inner and outer appearance from time to time. There are still some essential aspects and features that are commonly shared and retained throughout the course of history.

In this chapter, we will be engaging closely with the following four texts: “Machi no soko” (“The Underside of Town”, 1925) by Yokomitsu Riichi, “Hanayaka na Shinjuku nitsuite” (“Colorful Shinjuku”, 1930) by Yoshiyuki Eisuke, “Peibumento sunappu—yonaka kara asa made” (“Pavement Snapshots”, 1930) by Ryūtanji Yū, and “Semento Daru no kana no tegami” (“Letter in a Cement-Barrel”, 1926) by Hayama Yoshiki, to deeply delve into some of the intriguing aspects of the urban space. The chapter is divided into three main sections. The first section puts a focus on the different visual representatives of the city, analyzing the geometrical, conceptual, and abstract descriptions among some of the selected texts. We see different shapes of space that incorporate geometry and atmospheric visions of the city as a unity, and how people are integrated and actively engaged in the urban landscape. The second section shifts its focus to

money and work, in which under the system of capitalism, one must struggle with balancing costs and expenses, while still enjoying the illusions and pleasure generated by innumerable stimuli of lights and sound. I explore how the space has manipulated perceptions of pleasure and daily life, making the mindset preoccupied with continual production and consumption on one's vigor and energy for further expenditures. Moving on to the last section, we talk about the significant meanings of modern building construction materials as a new medium. Concrete forms an enclosed sphere for the city and people, creating alienation in buildings both for work and residence. The solid, dense material furthermore assembles an impenetrable membrane or cover that engulfs both the place and people involved. Moreover, the implementation of the concrete dehumanizes one's being, as it transforms the body and its energy into a product for consumption, exploitation, and for the production of concrete. At the same time, having labor in exchange for money is not enough for sustaining the self and family. Throughout the chapter, we go deep into exploring how space affects the activities and patterns of living by common people and one's subjectivity while being placed within this mysterious and conceptual space that is essential for everyday living.

### *Visualization of the Urban Space*

In the text "Machi no soko", Yokomitsu Riichi provides a unique perspective on the representation of urban space, in which the space is stretched out as a flat but dimensional outline of the city, where people's daily activities are mainly oriented toward the fluidity of the space itself. One of the outstanding features of the text is the description of the urban space in

terms of geometrical shapes. For example, here is the route the protagonist passes through daily, where “Every day the man walks silently past these shops as he makes his way up to the top of the green hill. Three roads in town lead straight to the conical hill from different directions and wrap around its base” (Yokomitsu 103). The city is present in the shape of a pyramid where the conical hill is the center with shops lining up as organized lines. By visualizing the city as this, it seems to be evident that the physical space has been carefully designed and structured for the purpose of not only environmental urban planning, but also for the limitation of movement and activities of individuals. At night, the man observes that “The crowd streams in from the high streets on the circular rim of the cone,” where they would have to pass through a certain path in a certain direction, within a certain range of area located on the “circular rim of the cone” (Yokomitsu 105). In addition, the city is divided for the regular operation of the place. As we follow the spectator of the protagonist, the north and the south are very distinctive from each other, where in the northern side, “stately aristocratic mansions stand in a row, where air and sunlight pass through freely, unimpeded by gravity,” a region that is organized and clear, and in contrast the southern part is inundated with “easterly winds laden with dust and pollutants, typhus fever, and the belching smoke of the factories” (Yokomitsu 104). The city is divided into different sections for different purposes, functioning to retain a balance and flourishing of the place, stable as a pyramid. Moreover, not only the outer appearance of the city is visualized through geometry, and so as the inner private space of an individual. The man rents a small room in the back valley, where his room “has a splintered pillar that leans off to one side, and sooty walls, carved into giant maps by streaks of rainwater and dotted by fly droppings” (Yokomitsu 105). As the pillar leans off it creates a triangular shape inside the room, which somehow applies

limitations on the range of movement within the space. The man then gazes at a pile of copper coins as he lays down on the mat, imagining that “the mechanical volume of copper coins lying still at the bottom of the town is the axis from which the whole town radiates in the shape of a magnificent cone” (Yokomitsu 105-106). It is an interesting relation here, in which the copper coins, a monetary capital necessary for living and the development of the city, seen as the axis that extends from the bottom to the top of the city cone, implies how classes work under a capitalist system implemented in a modern city. With “coins,” or capital accumulated, one is able to escalate to a better living standard, rising from the bottom to a higher social status.

Yokomitsu’s exceptional portrayal of the town as shapes of a cone, a pyramid, and lines exhibits the depth of a space from a perspective that we rarely use in everyday seeing and observing. The shapes provide accessibility for one to envision and conceptualize a subject so-called “urban space” which can be abstract to think of. In mathematics, these shapes are measurable with certain length, width, and height. Putting the space into the form of enclosed shapes demonstrates aspects of the space that are relatively tangible for one directly to perceive and experience.

Shockey mentions that “the protagonist’s movement within the city and his grasp of the exchange relationship imbued in the money form produce a more ordered vision of the city that allows the high city and the low city to be grasped as a totality beyond this apparent fragmentation” (Shockey 150); I would say that while the physical space can be visualized in shapes, there are nonetheless expressive details that outline how people are perceived within the space as a unity. People living within the space are assimilated into the space as they are “reduced” to irregular shapes as well. For example, the man has the obsession of peeping at the

breast of a sick woman nearby through the crevice of the broken wall. By staring, he notices that “his world turns into a single expanded breast while the faint glow of early dawn comes upon him. Gradually the mountain of the breast begins to trace dazzling streaks in the space before him, until it topples like a collapsing turret under its immense weight, retaining only the afterimage of its form” (Yokomitsu 105). The orb-shaped breast here acts as a miniature of the bigger pyramid-shaped space, as the breast starts to move, gradually falls down, and then stops. The motion of the breast somehow resonates with the static and dynamic motions that have been taking place in the city. As we have discussed thoroughly in regard to Asakusa in Chapter One, the charm of the modern city is the constant changing and updating of one's everyday perceptions of the surroundings, alluring and confusing them. By looking at the motion of the breast, the protagonist is at the same time witnessing the process of this changing aspect of daily life, which is the reason why he feels “close” and “familiar” with this imagery—he is being placed at the very core of the experience of this urban space, and hence he has the indescribable feeling of familiarity as there is only the “afterimage of form” that is left over in his mind at the end.

Besides the image of the breast, certain groups of individuals are associated with obscured figures. For instance, the man sees the girls depart from school as “colorful waves of virgins surge out of the gate, ...like a stake awash in rapid waters, he stands still, watching. The waves of virgins split into two in front of him and, like a swaying garden of flowers, flow gently on” (Yokomitsu 103, 106). On the other hand, sometimes the man walks on the street and “would be swept along by the dark avalanche of workers that pour out of the factory gates in a storm of fatigue. Forming a continuous slithering procession, they keep their eyes down, like a funeral

march, and flow quietly into the underside of town” (Yokomitsu 104). The wave is soft and gentle, which resonates with a stereotypical image of young females as flowers; whereas the storm is strong, powerful, and threatening, which resonates closely with masculinity, and in this case sweating workers. The two figures of wave and storm, which are natural phenomena, suggest the fluidity of the movement of people that goes spontaneously due to the orderly structured space that they are living in. While the place is constructed by people, this environment also influences people’s actions and habits by unconsciously transforming their perceptions, so the people are being closely involved, but cannot see clearly. The man observes the girls and the workers as an outsider, and as how he previously looked down at the urban environment, he is able to see the space and people with an extraordinary perspective. However, if he imagines the town collapsing and walks into the crowd, he runs into “a sudden rush of sadness overcomes him and he stands still. It is the fleeting sadness of existence” (Yokomitsu 106). Here, the man does have a distinct viewpoint of the space, yet at the same time he is inside at space, becoming part of the crowd. Yokomitsu implies the inevitability of integrating one into space, unable to slip away, even though it can be approached and deciphered as concrete shapes from a distant point of view.

Beyond using geometry as a way to visualize the space of a modern city, Yoshiyuki Eisuke offers a different perspective that takes us to another dimension in envisioning urban space. At the beginning of section II in his “Hanayaka na Shinjuku ni tsuite,” he starts with a beautiful description of Shinjuku, a popular and energetic district in Tokyo, with the following, “With its cramped and narrow streets, Shinjuku is a pair of feet tightly shod in the slippers of the suburbs. Relegated to the skirts of Tokyo, its inhabitants reside within the heelless interior of a

woman's shoe. They rise and don a great *happi* coat as day breaks and their neighborhoods are awash in a materialistic jumble of gaudy colors. *Happily* ignorant of the salaciousness it covers, the coat hides beneath it all of the silk slippers that got soiled in the night" (Yoshiyuki 446). In this passage, Tokyo is personified as a woman and Shinjuku being the feet of Tokyo. With direct reference to specific body parts of a female which include "feet," "interior of shoe," and under the "skirts" with "silk slippers", parts that are often viewed as unrevealed and sexually sensitive, the use of the image of a woman implies the characteristic of the city being intentionally seductive. Under the cover of the coat that is made of neon lights, material goods, commercial shops, and so on, the city shines with great colors and produces desires in the mind of those experiencing it. By opening the story with such an expressive depiction, Yoshiyuki conveys that the occupied space actually has the power and initiative to allure and trap people, who are blinded due to the illusions caused by artificial lights, to make them fall into the consumption of the materialized living rhythm and style, further evoke longing it more. This alluring power contains the ability to be transmitted throughout the whole space, permeating into the heart of every individual.

In the story, the manager of the R chain of apartment buildings, Matsuchi Tazaemon, is eager to find a girl who drives a motorcycle. Yoshiyuki offers advice for him by writing, "For you boys who love the smell of gasoline fumes, all you need to do is get out and walk the streets of Shinjuku. Imbibe the air" (Yoshiyuki 450). In this case, even though the air triggers sexual appetite. A motorcycle, an industrial machine that symbolizes the modern, is linked to erotic impulse and has the presence of a female converted into the target "product" to fulfill curiosity, and the carnal interest of the male character Tazaemon. Tazaemon's attention is not on the

motorcycle, but on the woman driving the motorcycle. The above passage discusses this special quality of the urban space, in which it places an invisible sphere around the physical space of the city, constantly fulfilling and creating new forms of sensational pleasure by various stimuli that one finds irresistible to accept and attach to. Yoshiyuki writes, “Material Shinjuku. A city created from the wild fantasies of modern engineers. Seductive Shinjuku. A city of plate glass that betwiches every consumer” (Yoshiyuki 447).

We have witnessed how urban space, either physically or perceptually, transforms activities of people in a significant way. Now, Ryūtanji Yū, opens up another viewpoint that the urban space can be defined by both the physical setting and the presence of people. In “Hanayaka na Shinjuku ni tsuite”, the space is present as a comparatively abstract and obscure atmosphere, whereas in Ryūtanji’s “Peibumento sunappu—yonaka kara asa made”, the occupancy of concrete buildings and actively participating people seem to have a mutual relationship in terms of the development and consumption of the space. The following passage is a night scene of city Tokyo, “Soon the bright electric signboard on the newspaper company roof will unroll the jittery thread of the night’s news into the sky. Elevated trains with rows of brightly lit windows come and go in between the dark, silent buildings with firmly shuttered front doors. On the street below, headlights stream like beads on a Buddhist rosary, and pedestrians crawl like ants” (Ryūtanji 125-126). In this passage, we see a crowded, busy scene of artificial light shining over the darkness of the night, interspersed with buildings, trains, and people walking beneath. The operation of the signboard and bright-lighted trains here not only act as stimuli but run to serve a large volume of people who use these services. While there is the electric light in contrast to the areas covered with shadow, there is also the sound produced from people walking, talking,

and driving, in contrast to the silent building where no one is present. Moreover, there is the colorful “Deep crimson, green, purple. Neon signs cling to the retina. The blinking illumination of the Chevrolet advertising tower. Blue sparks shooting from a trolley—Crackle! The seven-story department store is open for business at night, its windows brightly lit” (Yoshiyuki 127). Under such a setting it goes along with “the noise of people squirming around the night stalls on the pavement mingles with the sound of the newspaper seller’s bell and the horns of the automobiles” (Yoshiyuki 131). These sensational stimuli of emitting light from the advertising tower and department store, and noises from all around, seem to demonstrate that there is a constant production and reproduction of the liveliness of the city through the interaction between the stimuli and people involved. The space is constructed and open for people in which they react, consume, utilize, and recreate these signs and motifs, taking control of the flow of the city together. There seems to be mutual influence between the stimuli and people that tends to be significant in terms of how these signs would be manipulated further and how people then react and perceive the new unprecedented sensations. Once the text characterizes the sight of Shinjuku at night as, “Shinjuku—Yamanote’s Ginza. Here too, nighttime is a sea of lights, a human vortex” (Yoshiyuki 130). Here, the space is described with both the stimulus, light, and the living participant of people. Having people being actively engaged with the hodgepodge of signs, the modernness of a city is enhanced and continues to be recognized, bewildered, and yet enjoyed.

*Money and Materialized Subjectivity*

As we Delve deeper into the life experience of individuals, it is evident that some aspects of people's subjectivity have been structured by the system of money. One aspect is the conflict between living and work, which is embodied in "Machi no soko", where the man is struggling with the fact that "He can't work. Any mental exertion required for work gives him a headache, and as a result, he cannot make a living" (Yokomitsu 103). His inability to think about work shows a condition in which one finds incompatible with the mentality that one has to rely on work in order to live. "He needs money—a mere ten sen—so he won't have to think at all. And if he could quit thinking, he would be cured of his illness. Yet if he moved, he would sense hunger. Once he sensed hunger, ten sen a day would not be enough" (Yokomitsu 104). Here, the man's struggle between work and money draws out a chain relationship of how one is compulsorily connected to work, which brings substantial income to fulfill one's basic needs for living. For the man, there is an unbreakable rule for survival, in which he has to think about work and work his pen out in order to obtain the ten sen for a day of breathing, for the normal operation of his body. Like how the man acknowledges that "selling three magazines would fetch him ten sen, and as long as he knew this formula, he had no fear of living," the space which hosts capitalism to root manipulates the way people think about pleasure and living, who expend their bodies toward the revenue of urban prosperity. The dependency of how one is preoccupied with their labor becomes essential to not only the maintenance of ordinary body functions, but also to the long lasting of the city. Under such conditions, one would have to be cautious about their expenses, essentials, and leisures.

In addition to this discovery, “Hanayaka na Shinjuku ni tsuite” exhibits another aspect of human emotion and energy is consumed as a form of commodified product. As we turn to section VIII of the text, we see an account statement established by Asai Kōko, whom Tazaemon has had sexual relationship with before. The statement is sent to Tazaemon after her night service to him.

<b>ACCOUNT STATEMENT</b>				
	Carnal	Emotional	<i>Ero/Guro</i>	Miscellaneous / Suggestions for Future Play
I. Energies Produced	30 yen	10 yen	70 yen	170 yen
II. Energies Expended	30 yen	10 yen	70 yen	170 yen
III. Committed to New Production	10 yen	70 yen	170 yen	30 yen
IV. Committed to New Expenditures	10 yen	70 yen	170 yen	30 yen
	80 yen	+ 160 yen	+ 480 yen	+ 400 yen

(“Hanayaka na Shinjuku ni tsuite”, section VIII, Yoshiyuki 451)

In the statement, the amount of energy produced and consumed is converted into a certain amount of monetary value according to different categories of usage: carnal, emotional, ero/guro, and other costs including fee for future play. Energy and emotion, which is supposed to be immeasurable and invaluable, is being transformed into tools for business rather than acting as the organic source supply for a human well being. In the sexual activity shown in the billing statement, not only the body is being sold, but the sentimental satisfaction and feeling is exhausted in order to create excitement. When Tazaemon receives the bill, he is not content

about the amount charged for emotional energy being less than the amount charged for the erotic grotesque (*ero/guro*). Kōko then responds with a satiric tone, “Oh, that’s making you unhappy, is it? Heavens, Tazaemon honey, don’t tell me you think you’ve emotions and feelings? As for our mutual friend here—little ol’ Kōko—all she got out of you was a generous dose of *ero/guro*” (Yoshiyuki 451). Kōko’s statement implies that there is a gap between the two on the acknowledgment of different needs for each other, in which one is looking for emotional amusement whereas the other is only feeling the expedient endeavor for creating the setting of *ero/guro*. Within the context of modernity, there are many other Kōkos who are selling their own body and energy in exchange for pleasure and living. Mukōyama Reiko is another example of a person who “who sells both the allure of the proletariat and the science of speed,” accompanied with the fascination of modern technology and impressive efficiency and speed of a machine (Yoshiyuki 450). In “Peibumento sunappu”, there are girls who are being tagged with prices, identified as “one-yen taxi girls, stick girls” (Ryūtanji 136). Even one’s private experience has once become a form of entertainment, as described in a scene where a woman is having a conversation regarding her love affair with the man, and she bargains with the driver for the taxi fee by claiming, “Well, since we let you listen to our love affair for free, why don’t you give us a discount?” (Ryūtanji 130). Like how one is to pay bills for heat and electricity, the whole of one’s being is transferred into consumables. The urban space enacted under the influence of capitalism performs as a platform for one to exploit vigor and senses for monetary matters and living affairs.

After taking a close look at the case of individual experience, it is also interesting to inspect the masses in relation to the overall condition and style of living within the urban space.

In “Hanayaka na Shinjuku nitsuite”, the owner of N Restaurant & Bakery and the head clerk of M-S Department Store are having an excited conversation. N praises the head clerk for an excellent job in making the department store prominent, and the clerk replies with gratitude, “In the future, the public will have you to thank. The masses will come and show their appreciation for all you’ve done to foster the growth of the modern metropolis” (Yoshiyuki 448). It is evident here that the majority of the masses hold a positive attitude towards the success of not only the store but as well as the prosperity of modernity. They welcome and celebrate the progress in the development of the modern setting, immersing the whole body and mind into this special space of kaleidoscope, even for those who “you don’t need a magnifying glass to see that they have absolutely no “gelt” in their pockets!” would very much enjoy and appreciate the vibe of lust and hilarity (Ryūtanji 126).

### *Trapped inside the Concrete*

One of the most symbolic features of urban modernity is the use of concrete in architectural constructions, such as office buildings, department stores, and residential houses. Not only is concrete a common material utilized in building roads, but has become an integral part of a city if one were to define it as modern. It has penetrated into every aspect of mundane and forms a sphere that is inclusive but isolated. In “Peibumento sunappu”, Ryūtanji includes several scenes that detail the everyday routine of different groups of individuals. For example, in the morning, “The salarymen from the suburbs surge forth—by electric railways, by government-owned railroads, by buses, and by streetcars” (Ryūtanji 139). At the same time,

there are also people who work overnight and get off duty on the day time: “At the break of day, a flood of laborers pours out from cheap boardinghouses, from flophouses, from apartments, from slums, and from the inside of iron pipes to eateries, to factories, to employment offices, to construction sites of bridges, to building sites, to rivers, and to the streets!” (Ryūtanji 139). From these two scenes, one is able to observe the strained relationship between people’s activity and the presence of concrete, in which working space and living space are all centered and oriented by concrete—where people work and live inside and commute through the countless concrete mixtures one after another. Looking back at history, people used to build houses with wood or bamboo. Due to natural disasters, there were fire accidents frequently occurring back in the day, houses were easily crushed down to ashes. Since the introduction of the West, concrete was widely adopted and implemented into practical uses. It does improve living conditions and safety for the whole, yet on the other hand it functions not merely as a reassuring and secure shelter, but gradually engulfs the city and people by forming a physically and psychologically enclosed environment. Unlike wood and bamboo, which are relatively soft and loose, concrete is solid, dense, and tightly compacted. Its coldness and durability does not actually bring flexibility for actions that are meant to be done within the interior space. As how Yoshiyuki illustrates the space of Shinjuku in which “the buildings along your streets have risen out of the chorus of praise for the architectural membrane that runs near the Equitable Building on Broadway in New York City. The Internationalism of Ferro-Concrete,” the material of concrete constructs a “membrane,” a “shell” that blocks and creates distance with outer space (Yoshiyuki 447). Under such conditions, people have an unfamiliar hazy feeling towards this place. Once a drunken man yells at a beggar on the street, asking, “Is the concrete their home on the ground? Give me a

break! Look, they're sleeping with their cheeks pressed against the concrete" (Ryūtanji 134). The material of concrete has created a sense of alienation inside people's mind, which on one hand they are living within the sea of concrete; it is their work and resident bases. On the other hand, there is an indescribable estranged sense of the relationship between the condition of living and the immediate experience with the concrete, just like how impenetrable it is to break through a piece of brick. Within such a condensed environment, the perception of reality is as well being "pressed" and transformed into cold, flat words on paper. Here is a passage where Ryūtanji highlights the inner operations in the building, "But behind the window framed in concrete, the high-speed rotary press groans like the devil, promising to turn today's world events into tomorrow's sensations and sending them out in a dizzying waterfall of paper. Cold and indifferent journalism cuts up human society and casts the fragments in lead type. Here, one girl's chastity—let alone human life itself—is worth less than a few cigarette ashes" (Ryūtanji 132-133). Just as there are various mechanical components that work inside of a clock, there is a capitalized mechanism running "high-speed" inside of the space of concrete, which compresses the very front perception and the personal experience into something inorganic. Not only is information being transmitted through the paper, but this type of mechanism is getting spread into every building of concrete.

In addition to how the urban city is constrained into an enveloping concrete environment, it dehumanizes the presence of being in certain ways. A snapshot shown in "Peibumento sunappu" gives a straightforward embodiment of individuals' reaction to living among buildings, forest of concrete:

The rush hour electric trains roar past the windows of buildings— Streetlights streaming in the dark evening, their light sometimes swallowed in the shadows of buildings. ....

“Could you p-put out that cigarette?” stutters a pale-faced young man, probably a laborer.

“...?”

“What?”

“Put out your cigarette!”

“Humph. You the conductor?”

“Put it out. You’re bothering everyone. Look, your smoke—can’t you see it’s making us wince?”

“Where does it say that I can’t smoke here? The sign just says ‘Please refrain from smoking’ ‘Please refrain from’ isn’t ‘Do not,’ you know.”... “Mind your own business, you cheeky...”

...

At that moment, someone thrusts a powerful arm out from the crowd and punches Gold Tip’s chin with a fist like a hammer.

(Ryūtanji, 126-127)

The above situation can be commonly found in real life, where people randomly bump into conflicts and start arguments over trivial matters. Despite any personal subjective reasons that lead to the disagreement, there is seemingly a sense of restlessness seeded within one’s mind as a consequence of being surrounded by buildings of concrete. When one leaves the building off work, on the way to commute one sees the extensive occupancy of other buildings, whether one is talking on a train or by walking. At night, the city will be lit up with various neon lights from advertisement boards, streetlights, department stores, and so on, projecting sharply onto one’s whole body. By being fully exposed under dazzling lights that can even “swallow in the shadows of buildings,” one is as if trapped among inescapable buildings and artificial light. Such a provocative space has psychological effects on one’s sensation and perception, which are continuously stimulated and disturbed. In the above scenario, the man Gold Tip is being punched because of smoking. On one hand, the dislike attitude of the smoke implies the limited space that is given to each individual in terms of socially comfortable distance. In other words, from a bigger perspective people are surrounded by concrete buildings, and as they zoom inside people

are further restrained and set by more tangible concrete fragments that are more visible. On the other hand, there are certainly rules and regulations that restrict people's actions in order to preserve tranquility of the city, putting invisible power monitoring people's behavior. By being involved in both the physical confining concrete space and mentally restrictions on daily practices, it is reasonable that this sense of restlessness is evoked and in this case, the impulse of violence is triggered, breaking the peace of the night.

Another aspect of the medium of concrete manipulating the meaning of one's being is the function of one's physical body when involved within this medium. Entering the setting of "Peibumento sunappu" that Ryūtanji has designed, when the night comes, the crowd starts to rush into the congested streets. Looking closely, there is "[a] young, newly married salaryman cheerfully swings a shopping bag from the Matsuya department store. Like a fish in an aquarium, the beautiful girl posing as a mannequin spends the whole day in the glass show window fantasizing about the lover's soft kiss on her red, chapped lips. Laborers, their long hair sticky with rust and oil, finger union pamphlets in their khaki overall pockets" (Ryūtanji 126). Here, the man engages himself into a department store, spending a reasonable amount of time and money consuming commodified products; the girl places herself in front of a glass show window inlaid on the wall of concrete throughout the day; laborers are affixed with waste produced from factories. Their bodies are oriented around the presence of concrete where they all prompt to make their bodies present to a location of concrete. The presence of concrete motivates how and where one is to present the body, and as well as to get their body marked or modified, as how the girl adjusts her body to different poses to fascinate her own imagination on love and the laborers'

certain body parts are stained. It is as if people are being transformed into exhibits in a museum of concrete, in which their body is integrated into the realm of concrete.

This idea of bodily transformation also appears in “Semento Daru no kana no tegami” by Hayama Yoshiki. The protagonist finds a letter from a box that is written by a woman describing the unfortunate incident of her husband getting caught inside a machine that cuts rocks. “There the material was mixed with small metal pellets and, with a wrenching scream, ground down to a fine grade. And finally that was heated until it became cement. His bones, his flesh, his soul; they were all ground down. He has become cement. All that remains of him are some scraps of his uniform. I sewed the very bag that contains him. My love has become cement” (Hayama 2). Compared to the actions of people, who perform inside and outside of the concrete, the analysis leans toward a more perceptual perspective to approach the phenomena, here Hayama depicts a tragic situation where a man is actually being ground into pieces, mixing with other components and becoming a lump of concrete. Here, the extremity and violence of a body being dissected implies the secretive nature of concrete, which during the production process, the body of the laborer is being fully exploited, reproduced, and converted into materials that compose a piece of concrete brick. Furthermore, the wife is afraid that her lover is going to be utilized in a building construction project, as she is saying “I could not bear it if my love were to become a hallway in a theatre, or the fence for a large estate. We can prevent this, can we not?!” (Hayama 2). From her words, there is a sense of coldness, and indifference that characterizes the very essence of concrete. It will be utilized to facilitate progress and renovation even as a mixture of human blood and flesh. As long as it is usable, even the body can be considered legitimate to be exhausted. Coming back to the protagonist, he is too a cement worker, and this is his appearance

during work: “It wasn’t as apparent elsewhere, but his hair and upper lip were plastered gray with cement dust. He thrust a finger into his nostrils, wanting to clear them of the concrete that turned his nose hairs to rebar, with the mixer constantly spewing out concrete, he didn’t have a lot of time to spend on his nose” (Hayama 1). By examining his body, one can notice that his face is all covered with dust and fragments of cement. His whole being is too preoccupied with work tasks that he does not have time to organize or clean off the muddy matters. “‘Ain’t likely to be no money in it then.’ He opened the next barrel. Matsudo didn’t have time to think; he had to fill the next container” (Hayama 1). From his statement, it is evident that the making of concrete devours and consumes both the physical and the mental energy of an individual. While this mechanical work is being considered as a job for income earning, it does not provide an inequitable condition for one to fulfill the gap between consuming and producing. The protagonist faces difficulty making life sustainable for his family, in which “‘Two meals a day, rent, clothes... [he] can’t even get a goddamn drink without breaking the budget!’” (Hayama 1). What is more problematic, is when he realizes there is no way for him to break himself apart from making cements because of family responsibilities and the unbreakable connections between the system of capitalism and the production and usage of concrete, he nevertheless finds himself empathizing with the emotional letter, claiming “‘It’s been too long since I’ve gotten good and hammered!’ he slurred. ‘We should take a shot at bringing this whole thing down!’” (Hayama 3).

### *Conclusion*

Over the course of this chapter, we have taken a close look at various sketches of urban space, its influence on people living in at space and the role of concrete, which is an essential element in constructing modern space. Firstly, we examined the extraordinary geometric shapes that Yokomitsu uses to portray a unique perspective of looking at the city as a space that is flat yet with depth. By having such a geometrical view, one is able to obtain a thorough observation of the mapping of the urban city, where people's movements and activities are organized and arranged around the geographical blueprint of construction. In the stories that depict Shinjuku and Tokyo, the space is once represented as seductive, as if having its own intention to allure and objectify people, continually producing desires that are irresistible, reproducing and recreating liveliness through countless dizzying stimuli and close interactions with people. We have touched upon the conflict between living and working in everyday experience. There is a reliance on work in order to keep sustained. Under the operation of capitalism, there is an imbalance between one's consumption and production. For instance, we have witnessed how one's emotion and energy can be converted into monetary value. Lastly, we turned our attention to the particular element of concrete, where we discovered that the use of concrete in buildings form an isolated sphere that contains and presents the perceptions and sensations of those people who are experiencing the place. Additionally, the presence of concrete dehumanizes one's being, as it raises the sense of restlessness and fully exploits the body for practical matters without any appreciation. By reading the selected texts in this chapter, we can grasp a comprehensive understanding of a so-called modern city, understanding what kind of space it is, and its intangible influences over both the physical and mental state of body and mind. As we dig

deeper, we discover the very essential nature of modern space formation, as well as the necessity one needs to maintain stability between one's perception of the concrete space and the way the individual engages with the space. This also includes the practical and active engagement with the charm and the lively spirit of the modern setting.

## Conclusion

In this senior project, I have discussed the major theme of Japanese writers of selected texts of modern Japanese literature using various techniques of narratives, disturbing imagery, and symbolism to understand the transformation of human subjectivity within the modern urban environment in the 1920s in Japan. Through writing, these authors attempt to discuss the psychological breakdown due to individuals' urban experience and disclose both the charm and harm of modernity. To recap, in Chapter One, I have investigated the bodily movement of people living in the neighborhood of Asakusa, seeing how the body of the dancing girls and spectators are manipulated into a spectacle. I also paid attention to the activities of the premature youth, trying to understand how Kawabata Yasunari exposes the social issues behind that have contributed to the restless attitudes and behaviors of the marginalized juveniles. In Chapter Two, I took a close look at Akutagawa Ryūnosuke's struggle on the practice and status of literature, analyzing the commodification of literature and sensory stimulus that trigger mental breakdown of the narrator, and Akutagawa's intention behind the use of his narrator in the story "Haguruma" as a way to experiment the possibility to overcome the boundaries of commodified literature and his own salvation from "vague feeling of anxiety." Through a selection of Japanese modernist short stories, Chapter Three discussed the exterior aspects of the urban space, including geometric shapes and structures of the urban city, the movement of money, and materiality of the concrete. By reading these Japanese modernist texts, I have gained a thorough understanding on how these Japanese authors took an interest and initiative on exploring and exposing the

alienation and confusion resulted from the urban experience, yet at the same time celebrating the beauty and fantasy of the alluring neon lights, sounds, advertisements, and eroticism.

By this project, I had this opportunity to delve into the fascinating world portrayed by the amazing Japanese writers, unpacking their unique vision and comprehension of the urban environment and its impact on individuals' life that is not easy to notice. I incorporated some of the Japanese original scripts and it was remarkably interesting to compare the Japanese language with the English language, helping solve puzzles the authors have left over—figuring out what is behind a certain symbol, what is the use of a particular character, what is the significance of the profound image in the passage. Through reading, I was deeply impressed by how Japanese intellectuals during the 1920s played around with exceptional literary expressions to present a fresh and sometimes bizarre perspective, finding the unordinary from the ordinary, of the urban environment, which distinguishes what other people in the society considered as common sense or normal phenomena. As I appreciate the endeavor of these Japanese authors in showing the extraordinariness of the modern setting, at the same time I am inevitably attracted to the criticalness, beauty of language, and uncommon perceptions of objects in life that are presented in the realm of Japanese literature, these essential features that ignite my passion for reading and studying this particular academic discipline.

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