

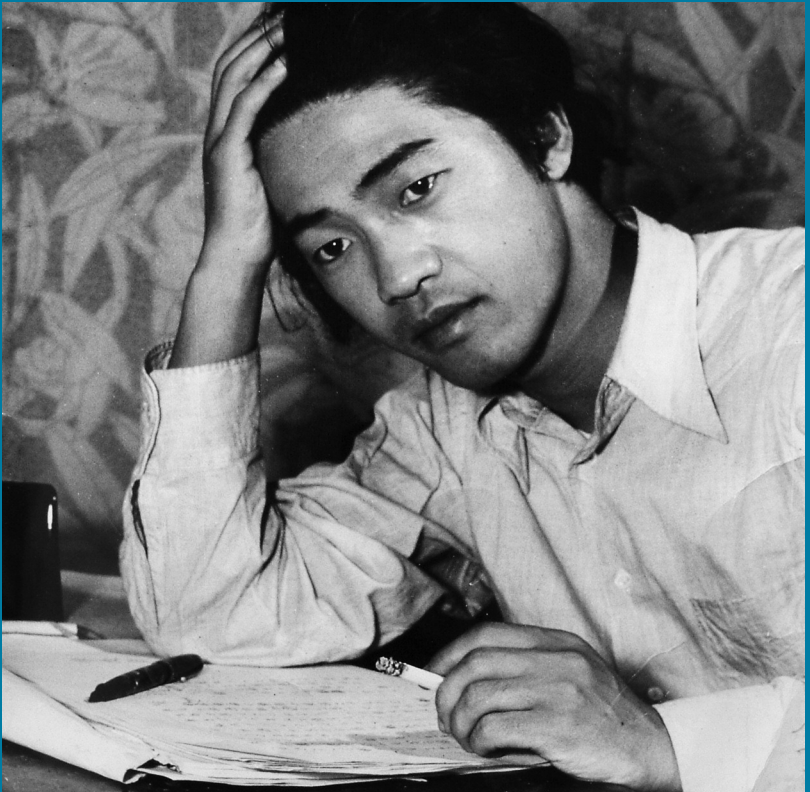
Iaponia Insula



Thomas Schnellbächer

Abe Kōbō, Literary Strategist

The Evolution of his Agenda
and Rhetoric in the Context of
Postwar Japanese Avant-garde and
Communist Artists Movements



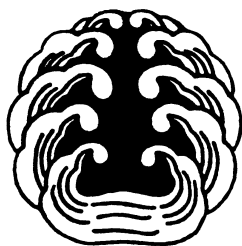
THOMAS SCHNELLBÄCHER
ABE KŌBŌ, LITERARY STRATEGIST

IAPONIA INSULA

STUDIEN ZU KULTUR UND GESELLSCHAFT JAPANS

Herausgegeben von
IRMELA HIJIIYA-KIRSCHNEREIT

BAND 13



2004

IUDICIUM VERLAG · MÜNCHEN

THOMAS SCHNELLBÄCHER

**ABE KŌBŌ,
LITERARY STRATEGIST**

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Postwar Japanese Avant-garde and
Communist Artists' Movements



Gedruckt mit Unterstützung des Fördervereins
japanisch-deutscher Kulturbeziehungen e.V., Köln (JaDe)

Die Vignette aus dem klassischen japanischen Repertoire der Heraldik nach Naturerscheinungen stellt *kawari tsui-nami*, einander entgegenschlagende Wellen, dar und soll hier eines der Hauptthemen der Reihe, die Begegnung der Kulturen, symbolisieren.

The cover photograph shows Abe Kōbō in 1951, working on the short story collection *Kabe* (Walls), with which he was to have his breakthrough as a professional writer later that year. Abe wore glasses ever since his school days, and there are not many photographs showing the author without a pair of more or less thick-rimmed spectacles. At this early stage in his career, however, he was too poor to replace them, if they were lost or broken. It would be rash to assume that this photograph shows the author's true face. It does however show him without his most familiar mask.

Bibliografische Information Der Deutschen Bibliothek

Die Deutsche Bibliothek verzeichnet diese Publikation in der Deutschen Nationalbibliografie; detaillierte bibliografische Daten sind im Internet über <http://dnb.ddb.de> abrufbar:

Zugl.: Diss. Freie Universität Berlin 2001

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ISSN 0947-1200

ISBN 978-3-86205-914-0 (E-Book)

My purpose was to plot a chart to survey the tactics and strategies of the warriors of the pen. Or rather I wanted to provide the squared paper on which to plot a chart.

"Charts for charts", 1954.

[...] Like the legs of a snake, 'things' flee infinitely. The discovery of things is an endless pursuit.

"First the dissecting knife", 1955/1957.

BACKGROUND AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This book is a slightly amended version of my doctoral dissertation presented at Berlin Free University (Freie Universität Berlin), and defended in October 2001. The dissertation project began in 1993 with my move to Berlin, into the atmosphere of new beginning that pervaded the city following its reunification. The period of composition and since has been marked by increased sobriety in my attitude to historic new beginnings, yet there is no denying the enduring fascination of such situations even when viewed with a critical gaze. In the course of this project, I received help from numerous individual people and institutions, without which it would have been a hopeless undertaking. Those named here are only the longest and/or most intensely involved.

In the first place, I want to thank my supervisor, Univ.-Prof. Dr. Irmela Hijiya-Kirschner for focusing my attention on the central themes of postwar and programme and helping me through a difficult planning stage, for seeing this lengthy project through, and for being always quick to respond to any queries despite a tight schedule and the difficulties of communicating between Tokyo and Berlin. Thanks go also to the supervisor of my M. A. dissertation on Abe's novel *The ruined map* (Moetsukita chizu) at Frankfurt University, Univ.-Prof. em. Dr. Ekkehard May, for his most stimulating seminars on Abe, from which this project can be said to have started.

The research for this project would not have been possible without funding from the Federal State of Berlin (NaFöG scholarship for Ph. D. candidates, 1995–1997) and the Japan Foundation (Research Fellowship for Japan, Jan.–May 1998). Special thanks are also due to the JaDe Foundation, Köln, for its generous publication grant. I am more personally indebted for funding to people close to me, who supported me over long stretches with long-term loans and/or private 'grants'. These are especially my parents, Rev. Ernst L. Schnellbächer, M. Phil. and Ingrid Schnellbächer, B. A. (†2003), for whom my future must have been a constant source of worry, and my grandparents, Otto (†1997) and Hedwig Prager. During the arduous final editing process and beyond, I received more help and encouragement than I can possibly say from my colleague and now wife, Dr. Miriam Rohde (Hamburg University). This study owes a great deal

to her critical comments and her theoretical discipline as a political scientist.

Special thanks go to Dr. Abe Neri, the heir to the Abe Kōbō estate, for taking an interest in my project and taking time to meet me at a time when she was enormously busy with the newly appearing *Abe Kōbō complete works*, and especially for taking the trouble to introduce me to the people whom I was able to interview while in Japan. I am greatly indebted also to Univ.-Prof. em. Dr. Kawahara Eihō, Waseda University, for his hospitality of many years, and for making it possible for me to use the Waseda University Library. I am particularly grateful to Prof. Barbara Ruch (Columbia University), for giving me the opportunity to attend the Abe Kōbō Commemorative Symposium at Columbia in Apr. 1996), which was both a source of valuable information and the best possible opportunity to meet Abe experts and contemporaries from all over the world. I would also like to thank Prof. em. Dr. Donald Keene (Columbia University) for his very cordial comments, and Prof. em. Dr. Olof Lidin (Københavns Universitet, Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin) for taking an interest in my work during his time in Berlin, for sharing his personal knowledge of Abe Kōbō, and for his sense of humour.

Finally, I am indebted to the following people for comments, advice and suggestions in thematic and formal matters; for proofreading; for help in finding and/or procuring material; for accommodation; for short and long term loans: —

Prof. Dr. Christopher Bolton
University of California, Riverside/
Williams College, Williamstown (MA).

Dr. Heiko Fiedler
Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin.

Dr. Anne Gentes
Universität Göttingen/Berlin.

Ms. Ines Günther
Deutsches Institut für Japanstudien,
Berlin.

Prof. em. Hariu Ichirō
Wakō University, Tokyo.

Mr. Ikeda Takuo, Ms. Ikeda Minako
Saitama-ken.

Ms. Itoko Ishihara
Tokyo/Berlin.

Ms. Iwadare Taeko, Mr. Iwadare
Yoshimasa
Tokyo.

Ms. Iwadare Masako, B. A.
Tokyo University.

Mr. Manabe Kureo
Tokyo.

Mr. Miyanishi Tadamasa
Shinchōsha, Abe Kōbō Zenshū Hen-
shūshitsu.

Univ.-Prof. Dr. Klaus-Robert Müller
Universität Potsdam/
GMD Forschungszentrum Informa-
tionstechnik GmbH, Berlin.

Prof. em. Nakada Kōji
Hōsei University, Tokyo.

Mr. Namigata Tsuyoshi
Tsukuba University.

Mr. Andreas Niehaus, M. A.
Universität Köln.

Prof. Dr. Reinold Ophüls-Kashima
Freie Universität Berlin/
Sophia University, Tokyo.

Mr. Satō Masafumi, Ms. Satō Eiko
Abe Kōbō House/Abe Kōbō Archive.

Univ.-Prof. Dr. Stanca Scholz-Cionca
Freie Universität Berlin/
Universität Trier.

Mr. Satō Masafumi, Ms. Satō Eiko
Abe Kōbō House/Abe Kōbō Archive.

Univ.-Prof. Dr. Stanca Scholz-Cionca
Freie Universität Berlin/
Universität Trier.

Dr. Andreas Steen
Freie Universität Berlin.

Prof. Dr. Sven Thomas
Berlin/Evangelische Fachhochschule
Bochum.

Dr. Yoriko Yamada-Bochynek
Freie Universität Berlin.

Staatsbibliothek Preußischer Kulturbe-
sitz, Ostasienabteilung: Dr. Rainer
Krempien Dr. Helga Dressler, Mr.
Wolfgang Hadamitzky, Mr. Kitamura
Hiroshi, Dr. Thomas Frischkorn.

The staff of Waseda University Library.

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INTRODUCTION: A LITERARY CAREER IN THE CONTEXT OF THE POSTWAR

Abe Kōbō (1924–1993) is often characterized as a particularly universal Japanese author, international and beyond political dichotomies. While there is certainly no denying that Abe developed a literary technique that is accessible in a wide variety of cultural contexts, there is also a need to view his work in the context of his political commitment. Abe spent his formative years as a member of the Japan Communist Party (JCP) until he was expelled from the party along with more than twenty other writers at the beginning of 1962. This was also the year in which Abe published *The woman in the dunes* (*Suna no onna*), which was to win him a reputation as a major writer nationally, and also internationally after the film version (directed by Teshigawara Hiroshi) won the Special Prize of the Jury at the Cannes Film Festival in 1964. Whatever political views Abe espoused after 1962, it makes sense to ask what was the significance of his political creed to his aesthetics before that date. This contradicts the fact that effectively, Abe has seldom been discussed as a Communist writer, other than with regard to those 1950s works where Communist themes or motifs are impossible to ignore. It is as if Abe Kōbō the Communist and Abe Kōbō the author of world literature were not the same person.

In fact, Abe himself repeatedly addressed the problem of consistency in his epilogues, for example that to his second essay collection, *The philosophy of the desert* (*Sabaku no shisō*, 1965; c. f. III. 1.2). Having called the collection “so to speak the revelation of the tricks of my trade as a writer”, he makes a point of asserting the homogeneity of the body of texts in the collection, written in the course of the two decades since the start of his career. Conceding that his work as a whole must appear heterogeneous at first glance, he continues, using the desert metaphor of the book title:

I think that such erratic progress was hard to avoid for a traveller in the desert. As evidence of this, each text has compass needles hidden somewhere between the lines, like a secret image, and if one looks carefully, one's attention is drawn to the fact that they are always pointing to somewhere particular. And somewhere near this point, you will always stumble on a story or play of mine that is already there. [AKZb19, 413.]

The need to generate continuity, while simultaneously arguing the inevitability of discontinuity and revolutionary change, is characteristic of Abe, as it is of many writers who began their careers in the period of rapid social and cultural change after 1945, often referred to simply as “the postwar” (*sengo*). The consequences arising from defining a current age by the ending of what preceded it, will be an important aspect of this study.

In the epilogue to his first essay collection, *With the heart of a beast and a hand like a calculating machine* (*Mōjū no kokoro ni keisanki no te o*, 1957), in defending his body of essays against possible charges of inconsistency, Abe had named a rapid succession of three phases – existentialism, surrealism, and communism –, which he said were united by a continued commitment in artistic movements.¹ When he wrote the later of the two epilogues eight years after the first, Abe had been expelled from the Communist Party. Moreover, since he had effectively ended his active participation in politically committed arts and literature organizations at the same time, he is now looking back on yet another completed phase. But now, neither the past phases nor the present one are named. Of the three phases named, communism is the longest, and overlaps with at least that of the avant-garde (from ca. 1948²). After his expulsion, Abe published far fewer programmatic essays defining the basic nature and current tasks of literature, another argument in favour of the view that his basic literary convictions evolved while he was a Communist. This cannot be proved conclusively without examining the whole of a very varied career, something that a Ph. D. dissertation cannot hope to undertake. It is possible, however, to lay some foundations by looking in detail at just what evolved during Abe’s Communist period.

¹ AKZb7, 476; c. f. Section III. 1.1. In a 1956 dialogue with the critic Hariu Ichirō, Abe describes more elaborately how he had been an existentialist during war-time, but that the collapse of the social order in postwar Manchuria had demonstrated to him how “self-negating” was the existentialist principle that existence precedes essence (i. e. that human nature is essentially its potential to be something). Later, he continues, it was surrealism that had converted him to materialism (c. f. Abe/Hariu 1956, 147–148).

² Abe began attending the meetings of the Night Society (II. 1.3), one of whose central themes was the avant-garde, in 1948, and his story “Dendrokakaria” (*Dendorokakariya*), which made use of avant-garde aesthetics, was published in August 1948.

Little systematic research has been done on the connection between the movement activity and the development of Abe's literary values. Extended studies of this author have been conducted under a variety of different aspects, most of them dealing with literary or philosophical traditions or influences³, or describing themes and motifs in typological terms⁴. Such purely typological or narrative approaches help contextualize an author. They cannot, however, take into account the complex relationship between (in this case) Abe's creative output and his socio-political commitment. This study aims at reconstructing the intentionality of Abe's texts (i.e. the programme or agenda implicit in them, as it might have been understood by a well-informed contemporary), but it does not claim to distil his essence of an author, simply to define his place in a discursive context.

1 CONTINUITY, DISCONTINUITY AND THE INTENTION OF TEXTS

Abe Kōbō can be seen as a typical case of a Japanese artist who viewed his communist commitment and creative output as two aspects of a whole and placed his art in the context of a political vision that he identified with the Communist Party and the communist movement. His formative years as a professional writer were spent as a Communist activist, although his best known, and no doubt his best and most important, work was written after his expulsion from the party and his withdrawal from politics. It may well be that this political fall from grace unfettered him as an artist; yet the fact remains that during his formative years, art and politics were inextricably intertwined. It makes sense, therefore, to ask how Abe's aesthetics and his political convictions are related and connected to one another.

My assumption is that the author Abe Kōbō pursued one and the same goal as an artist and as a communist intellectual. The political and the aesthetic aims must therefore be related in some way, but one is not derived from the other. Further, I will aim to show that the political and the aesthetic aims are related in some way via the cen-

³ Book-length examples of this are Okaniwa 1980 or Arimura 1994.

⁴ E.g. Takano 1971, Currie 1973, Yasaka 1979.

tral values associated with the postwar era, in which he had his debut.

My impression is that a major factor preventing the rather obvious question of the relationship of Abe's political and aesthetic programme from being investigated has been the dichotomy of values dictated by the cold war, a dichotomy that came into being just as Abe was starting to publish in the late 1940s. The ending of the cold war with the break-up of the Soviet Union has made this easier in some ways. It must also be said, however, that on the one hand opinions on communism remain as divided as before, and on the other hand, there is a long tradition of criticism within the communist movement and of studies using related Marxist premises. What has emerged since the early 1990s, however, are a number of studies of the beginnings of the period involved, specifically with reference to the Japanese postwar.

Essays and essay volumes dealing with this theme are treated below in introducing the material on which each chapter is based, but there is also a monographic study of theoretical relevance. This is J. Victor Koschmann's *Revolution and subjectivity in postwar Japan* (1996), which deals with the problems associated with the debate on subjectivity (*shutaisei ronsō*), conducted between two major factions in leftwing literature soon after the end of the war (c. f. I. 2). The issue that Koschmann sees at the centre of these debates, which were concerned to define basic norms of socially committed literature in the postwar era, is that of the relationship of individual and group subjectivity. This is a problem pertinent not only to defining the degree and nature of autonomy that the individual has within a politically defined movement, but also to the function of creativity in such movements, and the relationship of generally bourgeois intellectuals to the common people. In describing the relationship of the freedom of a subject to the factors determining it, Koschmann introduces the term "supplement", denoting "something extra added on to what 'should' be self-sufficient".⁵ The problem for Marxist/communist

⁵ Koschmann 1996, p. 24. The source given for the political definition of the term is: Ernesto Laclau/Chantal Mouffe: *Hegemony and socialist strategy*, London 1985. However, the source for the quotation is given as Jacques Derrida: *Of grammarology*, Baltimore 1974, p. 144.

proletarianism is that the proletariat is supposed to be objectively the agent of the revolution, but in the practice of communist politics since the time of Lenin, this collective subject has continually been tutored so that it might fulfil what was defined as its historical destiny. This act of ensuring that the inevitable takes place, as well as the institutions and individuals engaged in carrying it out, constitute a supplement.

Koschmann is a proponent of the idea of social revolution⁶, and as such is not a disinterested theoretician. I do not propose to take up a position in this contradictory concept, but Koschmann's bias is useful for my study in a number of ways. The idea of subjectivity in the debates in question is closely related to questions of agenda that are at the centre of this study. The way in which individual, party and class subjectivity is defined has a direct bearing on how groups and movements define themselves, and how their participants think that they should be organized. How an author defines class consciousness underlies both his or her cognitive possibilities in perceiving social realities and issues, and the modes of communication with the proletariat or the masses through the arts. How a party or other organization defines subjectivity will help determine the degree of ideological discipline imposed on the individual members, and the nature and degree of hegemony claimed by the party. Finally, since this was a generational issue, it will help to define Abe's status as a writer slightly younger again than those involved in these paradigmatic debates. Effectively, Koschmann's programme is revealing because he has it in common with Abe Kōbō and his fellow-activists.

Besides the close-up view of one brief segment of Japanese critical history, it will be necessary to refer to a broader perspective in aesthetic history, and to a theory of text. For this purpose, I have used works by two German commentators, who both share with the Japanese protagonists of the present study the same canon of Marxist categories and problems, and have developed it to suggest ways in which artistic autonomy could be given a place in a socially committed artistic practice. One is Peter Bürger's *Theory of the avant-garde*

⁶ C. f. his closing sentence: "It is not that the democratic revolution [...] has failed, but rather that [...] it remains an 'incomplete project'." (Op. cit., p. 248.)

(Theorie der Avantgarde, 1974⁷), which deals with the significance of the avant-garde for artistic production and reception, the other Jürgen Link's *Elementary literature and generative discourse analysis* (Elementare Literatur und generative Diskursanalyse, 1983), which provides a model for text analysis that combines Marxist categories with elements of semiotics and discourse analysis.

At the centre of Bürger's study, which deals with the consequences of the "historical avant-garde movements" (*historische Avantgardebewegungen*) early surrealism and Dadaism for institutionalized art in bourgeois society, is the concept of the "non-organic work of art" (*nicht-organisches Kunstwerk*) as a fragmentary and open entity, a structural principle to which my characterization of agenda as a plural term also corresponds (c. f. Bürger p. 76–77 and 92–98). If a text or body of texts is principally open, then the oppositions existing between values in this entity also have a certain degree of contingency and possibly arbitrariness. Bürger gives an interpretation of how the relative contingency (*Zufall/hazard*) of the "non-organic" work of art permits social commitment by artists, without giving up artistic autonomy, an invention of the *l'art pour l'art* movement of the end of the nineteenth century. According to Bürger, such non-organic art will be necessary as long as there is a bourgeois society (c. f. p. 26–35 and 49–63). At the same time, he rejects the surrealists' cult of contingency as an idealization of something that they had introduced in order to escape being determined by ideology (c. f. p. 87–92).

Standing in the tradition of the critical theory of the Frankfurt School, he is interested in the avant-garde as a movement that laid the foundations for art to practise immanent (self-)critique (p. 27) of the ideology of its own contemporary society. These movements, which failed in their aim of "leading art back into the practice of life" (*Rückführung der Kunst in die Lebenspraxis*, p. 29), explains Bürger, revealed the causal connection between the institutionalized autonomy of art, and its "lack of consequences" (*Folgenlosigkeit*, p. 29). This is explained by the fact that although the avant-garde reacted against the radical claim to autonomy of the "aestheticist" *l'art pour l'art* movement, they inherited the "full articulation" (*volle Ausdifferen-*

⁷ An English version was published in 1984 (Manchester Univ. Press); however, references in this study are to the German original.

zierung) of the social phenomenon art embodied by the latter, providing the conditions postulated by the Marxian theorem that such articulation is the precondition for the generalization of a descriptive category (p. 21–22)⁸. Thus, while negating autonomy and postulating the sublation (*Aufhebung*, p. 67) of art and life in a new kind of practice, the avant-gardists benefited from the fact that the aestheticians had developed a whole catalogue of “artistic techniques” (*Kunstmittel* p. 22–23), from which they were now able rationally to choose.

Bürger appears to attribute the failure of the classical avant-garde to a certain vulnerability to absorption in practice by capitalist production (e.g. the mass production techniques employed by Andy Warhol), or in ideological terms by traditional institutionalized forms of production (the idea of creative genius) and reception (consumption) (p. 69–73). He therefore suggests not discarding the idea of autonomy, as demanded by the avant-gardists, preferring to adopt Adorno’s verdict that: “The only works of art that count today are those that are not works of art” (*Philosophy of modern music*, Philosophie der neuen Musik; Bürger, p. 76), paraphrasing the predicate as ‘works of art that are not organic works of art’. Of such a “non-organic” work of art, Bürger writes that it differs from an “organic” one in that the unity of the general and the specific is not postulated as something unmediated (given, and necessary in all its components), but that the unity is always mediated, being generated in extreme cases by the recipient alone (p. 76–77). In other words, no part is essential to the whole, and a closed whole is not essential for the understanding of the parts, which must logically refer for significance to factors outside the work, rather than the totality of the work. The category that Bürger uses to describe the constitution of such a work

⁸ The reference is to Marx’ *A contribution to the critique of political economy* (*Grundrisse der Kritik der politischen Ökonomie* (1859), which deals with the theoretical basis for an immanent criticism. Using the example of the category work, Marx explains that though the French physiocrats of the eighteenth century first explained the connection between work and wealth, it was not until this was developed further in the political economy of Adam Smith, that work and wealth could be seen in terms other than agricultural, because the industrial revolution was further advanced in the United Kingdom, and Smith was familiar with a greater variety of work processes. (Summarized by Bürger, p. 21–22).

is “montage” (French and German spelling identical: the term is modelled on cubist painting rather than film, where the parts tend not to be recognizable as a collection of heterogeneous units). This in turn he defines as a specific case of “allegory” in the sense used by Walter Benjamin in *The origin of German tragic drama* (*Der Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiels*, 1928), with its connotations of fragmentary artefact and melancholy. (P. 98–116 and 114, note 22.)

In sum, this amounts to the position that though the historical avant-garde movements failed in their aim of establishing a totality that overcame the discontinuity between art and social practice (because the practice of bourgeois society absorbed it), they nevertheless overcame the absolute discontinuity posited by aestheticism and provided the conditions for a new kind of autonomy based on the relative discontinuity of the “non-organic” work of art. Among the characteristics he gives for the non-organic work of art, is that it negates synthesis, within the work (p. 106). This means, amongst other things, that the act of reading is given a central function in constituting the whole, the parts being related in paradigmatic rather than syntagmatic ways within the text, and the reader having to make the connection. For works of fiction, for example, this means that not the events narrated in their own right are at the centre of attention, but the structuring principle underlying them (p. 107). This is linked also to Bürger’s position outlined in his introduction, that the place of content is taken, not by the effect intended by the author, but by the “intention of the work” (*Werkintention*), which he defines as “vanishing point of the effects [*Wirkungsmittel*] discernible in the work” (p. 12).

In order to do this for Abe Kōbō, therefore, it will be necessary to reconstruct the discursive context within which he was writing before being able to constitute the paradigms necessary for an interpretation. It is such paradigms, of course, that permit both continuities (similarities) with the age and discontinuities (differences) to be determined. These paradigms must be seen as acting in both directions, providing the conditions both for production and reception of a text.

Bürger’s idea of autonomy depends heavily on the concept of institutionalized art. While it is well-nigh impossible to determine how ‘autonomous’ a work is in reality, it is certainly possible to point out

that there is an immaterial institution effective in capitalist society, a discourse forbidding the instrumentalization of art. Similarly, it is possible to be objective about the extent to which a discourse or author espouses autonomy, and about how this concept is conceived, and it is possible to compare this with a theoretical definition. Yet, there is a more general difficulty in using this theory, which despite the fact that it deals with historical realities, is very abstract and cannot be applied directly. Nevertheless, the central concept provides useful guidelines for this study. Primarily, this is the idea of the non-organic work of art and the hypothesis linked to it that the structuring principle of montage permits autonomy through immanent criticism. Associated with this is the idea of the intention of the text based on the discursive context, and the assertion that the reader is responsible for the meaning, rather than the author. Of course, a study of this kind needs to objectivize these readings by constructing paradigms and structured models by which texts can be compared with other texts. This what I propose to do with Abe Kōbō's essays, and this is the purpose of the second theoretical work mentioned.

Link deals more concretely with structures of texts, and how their readers generate the meaning (hence the generative approach addressed in his title). He also deals with problems of autonomy and institutionalized art, but in a way that is focused on the constitution of texts and how they can be read within the norms given by social institutions. He uses the concept of the "inter-discourse" (*Interdiskurs*), which draws on Julia Kristeva's idea of intertextuality and combines it with the Marxist theorem distinguishing artistic practice as secondary production from material production proper. According to Link, ideology (which does not bear the pejorative connotations that the term has in classical Marxism) is "the imaginary totalization of practices" through a specific cultural discourse (p. 17). While such an ideological discourse associates certain values with certain shared symbols, inter-discourse consists of the sum of discursive elements common to more than one discourse, irrespective of the values associated with them in specific discourses. Literature is seen as the special case of an institutionalized discourse based on such inter-discursive elements (p. 69, note 2). For the transferable potential of inter-discursive signs, Link makes use of a property of tropes, particularly metaphors, namely their basic ambivalence. For example, there is a

certain tradition that images of floods are used to stand for social upheaval, but neither does this necessarily define such upheaval as positive or negative, nor is this the only way to read the sign. Implicit in this is also the potential for ambivalence between metaphor and metonym, especially in art that is based on mimetic principles.

Hence, it is the imaginary totalization characteristic of elaborated fictions that safeguards the autonomy of art. Institutionalized literature is contrasted with elementary literature: the “semi-finished products” of which institutionalized literature is composed, such as symbols or myths, and which Link characterizes as catachrestic and thus revealing hidden contingencies, in the manner of dreams, p. 29). Institutionalized literature is seen as constituting a coherent reality by virtue of its being divorced from social practice, thus enabling it to reflect society without being determined by pragmatic anchoring to a particular discourse (p. 30).

This is amongst other things a rhetorical approach to text analysis, which, once again, is the corollary of the fact that the reader generates the meaning based on the intention implicit in the text. Link’s approach provides a clue to how this intention can be analysed with recourse to tropes. The main potential of the theory for this study is in providing a model for how tropes are derived from social practice, how they become institutionalized in literature, and how they lend both a self-legitimizing and a critical potential to literature that enables it, according to Link, to maintain autonomy. The concept of the inter-discourse does not appear useful as an instrument of analysis, but provides an explanation in terms of discourse analysis for the way in which autonomy is legitimised.

There is an important difference to Bürger’s concept of autonomy. The latter had stressed the need for immanent criticism of bourgeois society from within, arguing that the open, non-organic work of art was the appropriate medium for this. In Bürger’s terms, Link appears to be more reliant on the traditional *l’art pour l’art* approach of founding autonomy on artistic homogeneity and discontinuity between art and social practice. From Link’s point of view, Bürger could be seen as advocating autonomy through elementary rather than institutionalized literature. On the other hand, this is simply a difference in emphasis, since both agree that it is the institution of art (or literature) that safeguards autonomy in bourgeois society. The essential difference

could be seen in the fact that Link emphasizes the importance of fiction, while Bürger argues for a weakening of autonomy and the importance of non-fictional elements. Effectively, this makes it possible to use these two approaches to make a scale that can be used to gauge the kind of autonomy aimed at by a particular author, such as Abe Kōbō.

In sum, the range of problems common to the author and his environment, the age as a whole, as well as a number of theoretical approaches, makes it possible to attempt an analysis of Abe Kōbō's literature that takes into account broad social discourses. The focus of the study is on an analysis of the intention and rhetoric of texts by Abe.

Rhetoric, according to a reference work covering a related discipline, has come to mean, since about the middle of the twentieth century, the "semiotics of communication in general" – having originally been the "semiotics of persuasion", thereafter "sinking" to become "semiotics of style" (1600–1800) and even "semiotics of falsification" (1800–1950).⁹ Leaving aside the question of how justified the broadly polemical disqualification of the intellectual trends of three and a half centuries is, I believe that the above characterizations of the antique and modern usages of the term provide useful points of orientation for the present study. The modern understanding of rhetoric as an aspect of communication in general makes it possible to use the terms of rhetoric as tools for the analysis of written texts, despite the fact that texts cannot, by their nature, give reliable access to the true authorial intention (the clear articulation of which is a rhetorical prerequisite in the act of composition, but which is not, of course, mentioned in the text itself). On the other hand, the modern understanding also revives that original understanding that rhetoric does not 'only' describe emotional or aesthetic qualities, but acts on the recipient in socially and politically relevant ways. For this reason, rhetoric is the predestined tool for gauging how a text not only articulates and explicates sociopolitical aims, but actually begins to put them into practice, by pre-structuring the act of reading.

But this is not to say that a text is necessarily motivated by a homogenous set of aims. Amongst other things, it is conceivable – and indeed probable – that it contains contradictory moments, and it may even have been composed precisely with the object of articulating

⁹ John McClelland: "Rhetoric", section on History in EDS, p. 815.

unforeseen contradictions. Hence, even texts that contain a considerable element of self-reflection, like lyric poems or essays, have a rhetorical dimension that can be analysed. Hence, it not only makes sense to analyse the rhetoric of homogenous moments of a text, such an analysis can be used to reconstruct the intentionality of parts of the text separately, and define the relationships between them. In addition, there is a difference between the logical argument of the discourse and the more suggestive workings of the rhetoric. It is conceivable that a text can work on readers in ways that contradict either the agenda expressed in it, or those expressed elsewhere by the same author. No author can be in complete control of the actual effect of the text, since it is impossible to account for all the possible readings of it, or for all the empirical readers that it will have.

By reason of their fundamental ambivalence, tropes are important variants in the reading process. Strictly speaking, any reference to extra-textual reality is figurative, since no sign of any kind can be identical with its referent. Thus, the reference to “nuts” and “bolts” in an instruction manual can be said to be metonymic, having a pragmatic relation to the material objects indicated. Metaphors are more fundamentally ambivalent, since a metaphor leaves it to the recipient to make the connection between the image and its pragmatic object(s). For this reason, metaphor can be seen as the central device giving access to the symbolic level of fictional texts, such as prose narrative, drama, or poetry.¹⁰

Instead of purely fictional texts, however, this study deals with essays for various reasons. The first is that much has been written about Abe’s prose fiction and plays, but not much about his essays, which also display a distinctive style, and moreover constitute an important discursive context for his fictional texts. This connection, interesting though it is, has been excluded here, because the aim of the exercise has been to reconstruct the status of the texts as acts in their time, and it is not possible to do this with reference to the texts of one author alone. Instead of a systematic comparison between essays and works

¹⁰ The essay genre is not mentioned by Link, but it would have to be positioned in the middle between specialized discourse, elementary literature, and institutionalized literature, partaking of aspects of the stringency of specialized discourse, the autonomy of institutionalized literature, and the open quality of elementary literature.

of fiction, this study cross-references essays and non-fictional narratives dealing with the contexts within which they were published.

The other reason is constitutive for this study, and has to do with the hybrid nature of essays. Given the aim of reconstructing the intentionality of primary texts, essays have the obvious advantage that at least a portion of their intentionality appears in the form of discursive logic, which is generally well hidden in works of fiction. This is not to say that essays necessarily reveal more about the author's true motivation than stories, but true motivation is explicitly not at issue here. Instead, next to declared intentions, the analysis will discuss moments appearing in the same text that are more suggestive, and may or may not have been consciously employed by the author to produce certain effects. This is the use of tropes.

Although essays are more discursive than purely fictional texts, one would expect that the more an essay relies on figurative reference, the more room there will be for ambivalence, interpretation, and contradiction.¹¹ One could therefore arrange essay types on a scale ranging from predominantly metonymic texts at one end (e. g. essays with strong elements of polemic or treatise), and to metaphorical texts at the other (coming close, for example to the form of the prose poem). As this typological sketch shows, the breadth of possible uses of the essay is considerable, and accordingly the essays discussed range from highly technical discussions of the psychology of authorship to newspaper articles for a broad readership, and from virtual prose poems to polemical attacks. However, the emphasis is on relatively discursive and directly programmatic texts.

In determining what types of trope are used, and how they are combined, I have found Julien Greimas' concept of "isotopy" helpful. This assumes that textual coherence is generated by "a series of redundant semantic categories which make a uniform reading of the story possible".¹² In other words, it is the repetition of certain seman-

¹¹ The fictional and/or ambivalent nature of the essay is a standard topic of essay theory. In his "Preface" to the *Encyclopedia of the essay* (EE, p. xix-xxi), Graham Good also summarizes this middle position as being "characterized as provisional and exploratory, rather than systematic and definitive," or again, he comments that: "Just as the essay is considered to be 'not quite' science or philosophy or theory, it is also 'not quite' art."

¹² Greimas: *Du sens*, Paris: Seuil, 1970, p. 188; cited from "Isotopy" in EDS.

tic characteristics shared by signs within the text, that enables a reader to make sense of it. Though formulated in the context of narratology, this can be applied equally to poems and historical narratives. I would like to interpret this in Link's sense, that an isotopy is associated with a homogenous sphere of social action or experience, which is generated by the text, rather than determining it from the outside. Hence, though metaphors are potentially incommensurable elements in communication, isotopy within a text is one way in which coherence between metaphorical images can be generated. Another factor contributing to coherency is the fact that, as Link discusses¹³, metaphorical images typically partake of inter-discursive topoi that straddle both sociopolitical and purely literary discourse, and hence contribute to the symbolism mediating the identity of a community.

Of course, there will be many possible isotopies at various levels of a text (pragmatic, metaphoric, phonetic etc.), and in fictional texts like novels and poems, the relationships between them are highly complex. The same can be said of essays, the more so if they are serious about an experimental approach. The nature of the isotopies used, and the relations between them, may, therefore, be used to analyse how the discursive and the experimental (or reflexive) aspects of the texts are related to one another. For example, a text generating elaborated isotopies mainly on the metaphorical level approaches fiction¹⁴, while a text that does not will leave it to the reader to generate isotopies from the context of his or her social experience.¹⁵ The analysis of the essays must aim to draw conclusions about the possible significance of Abe's use of isotopies in the light of the context in which his essays were published, including collective agenda and programmes.

This will have to be preceded by an account of the institutional context in which the texts were published, and this in turn by the broad discursive context of the age, dealing with literary issues of the postwar.

¹³ Link 1983, p. 11, 41, 73.

¹⁴ This corresponds to the kind of autonomy of expression that in Link's parlance characterizes institutionalized literature.

¹⁵ If such a text is examined for intra-textual cohesion, it will appear catachrestic, corresponding to Link's characterization of elementary literature.

This study will remain within the frame of the postwar, both ideologically and in terms of time. Of course, the term only provides an unambiguous date for the beginning, but not for the end. The end of the period to be examined is given by Abe's expulsion from the JCP at the beginning of 1962. Within this time frame, the investigation begins with a chapter dealing with the myths, ideologies and controversies of the postwar concerning literature, especially the significance of the myth of new beginning, of subjectivity, and of Communism and Marxism for this era. The second chapter will deal with artists' groups in which Abe was involved during this time, how they relate to the values and factions in the previous chapter, and what role Abe played in them. On this basis, the final chapter can analyse how his essays both articulate and embody literary agenda.

In Chapter I, the following aspects of *senjo* will be summarized: What is the significance of the myth of new beginning (if such it is or was) for the Japanese postwar, and what place was literature allotted? Particularly with regard to the theme of subjectivity, what ideological dichotomies and what factions arose from this? How did the Japan Communist Party draw from the principle of the new beginning, and what did it add to it? Finally, what changes took place in these relations, and can points in time be identified where debates and/or forms of organization permit sub-periods to be identified?

For the broad historical frame, I have drawn mainly on two essay collections published in the early 1990s, focusing on the meaning of the postwar for Japan: Ernestine Schlant's and J. Thomas Rimer's *Legacies and ambiguities* (Rimer/Schlant 1991), and Andrew Gordon's *Postwar Japan as history* (1993). Of interest from the first volume are in particular the contributions by Carol Gluck and Irmela Hijiya-Kirshnereit: In "The 'long postwar'", Gluck summarizes the significance of the idea of the postwar in Japan as zero hour, in particular with reference to definitions of its end, summarizing the ideology for which the term stood, and suggesting a series of sub-periods, defined by broad national and global sociopolitical events. This provides a useful system of basic co-ordinates to some extent for periodization in this study, but more still for the values associated with it and the significance of *senjo* as new beginning (c.f. I. 1). Hijiya-Kirshnereit ("The intellectual climate in Japan [...]") summarizes the rapid sequence of generations of writers, their conflicts and def-

initions in critical discourse. As one aspect of the problem of rapid changes after 1945, this illustrates the importance of generation conflicts in the postwar and helps to explain some of the difficulties faced by newcomers even within leftwing movements (c.f. I.1.4). The later of the two collections also features an essay ("The past in the present") by Gluck on a related topic, focusing on the consensus values associated with *senjo*, which she describes here as a "narrative" centred on peace, culture, and democracy. The same set of values is also addressed by John Dower ("Peace and democracy in two systems") in the same volume. In addition, however, Dower suggests a periodization based on inner-Japanese political structures alone, yielding the two "systems" of his title.

More specifically leftwing issues are addressed by J. Victor Koschmann in the study already mentioned, which gives a detailed account of the issues and persons involved in the subjectivity debate and related controversies of the same time. Since the issues involved take their bearings from pre-war traditions, in particular proletarian literature, it is also important to refer to the pre-war history. Here, I have taken my orientation primarily from George Tyson Shea's 1964 study *Leftwing literature in Japan*, which focuses on the proletarian literature movement in the 1920s and early 1930s. For the history of communist politics in Japan, I have used another panoramic account, published only slightly later, and dealing with both pre-war and postwar history, Robert A. Scalapino's *The Japanese communist movement, 1920–1966* (1967). Finally, my account of the literary debates of the early postwar is also based on a reference work, Hasegawa Izumi's *Encyclopaedia of modern literary debates* (Kindai bungaku ron-sō jiten, 1962), which outlines the major debates in Japan since 1866, thus giving details of more debates than does Koschmann, and complementing the latter's focus on one central issue with a more schematic chronological approach.

Chapter II will focus on the organizations and movements in which Abe Kōbō was involved from his publishing debut in 1947 to the end of his time as a Communist. In more detail, this involves the following questions: What was the group consensus on agenda, and how were these related to the values of the postwar? To what extent was the nature of creative activity and its place in society defined explicitly and in binding ways? How formally and in what kind of

form were the groups organized, and what was the relationship of individual subjectivity to group discipline? What was Abe's function and role in each group? Finally, when did major new developments in the organization take place, and how are these related to the periodization based on the first chapter? Each subsection treats an organization to which Abe was a significant contributor (with the exception of II. 3.3, which deals with the incisive event that ends this phase of his career). These are grouped in sub-periods derived from Chapter I.

The sources of information for this chapter are exceedingly heterogeneous. The groups involved are often not or only briefly treated in standard reference works on literature, even when they turn out to have been very influential on a large number of major artists (e. g. the Night Society, II. 1.3) or to have played a significant innovative and/or polarizing role in the literary scene (The Century, II. 1.2 and II. 2.1). Basic information about Abe along with somewhat random but occasionally interesting documents is contained in the tabular bio-bibliography in an Abe Kōbō glossary published shortly after his death (Tani 1994). The usefulness of this is limited by the fact that sources are given for documents, but not for biographical details, and some of the dates have turned out to be wrong. It is essential, however, being the most comprehensive biographic overview of Abe available. Information with better verification is given in the source notes to the *Abe Kōbō complete works* (Abe Kōbō zenshū, AKZ b). Again, the selection is somewhat arbitrary, since providing background information on artists' groups is not the primary purpose of these notes, but sources are more frequently given (though not always, for instance in the case of lists of members).

Where the institutions involved are large-scale organizations still in existence (this is the case with the JCP and the New Japan Literature Association), documents concerning events like important General Meetings and Party Conferences have in some cases been collected and published (e. g. SNBK 1948, 1952, and 1955; JCP 1957 and 1962; Kamiyama 1971). New Japan's principal organ *Shin Nihon bungaku* (SNB) occasionally (later regularly) published organizational information, such as the results of Editorial Committee or Executive Committee elections, in editorial epilogues or other rubrics created for this purpose. New Japan has also specialized in publishing retro-

spective accounts of its own history and aspects of it, mostly collected in features.¹⁶ For details of the JCP during the period in question, Scalapino's book once again provides the basic outline data, though no information, of course, about such a relatively minor activist as Abe Kōbō.

Much information on the artists' movements are to be gained from accounts by participants, either in isolated articles (e. g. Hariu 1976, 1988 and 1996; Katsuragawa 1989), or as series (Segi 1995) or as passages in a book (Sekine 1978). Each insert to the *Abe complete works* also features an interview by his daughter Abe Neri with one of her father's contemporaries. These reminiscences were complemented by interviews kindly arranged for me by Dr. Abe with people who had participated in the groups treated (Hariu 1998.in, Manabe 1998.in, and Nakada 1998.in), which revealed some details not previously published and were able to elaborate on others.

As might be expected, there is not one reliable source for group manifestos or statutes, but I was able at least partly to trace the documents regarding most groups (exception: the Present Society, II. 2.4), either in the source notes to the *Abe complete works*, or retrospective articles by participants who quoted from their own copies of newsletters or pamphlets.

By contrast, there is a single source for all the texts treated in Chapter III. This is the *Abe Kōbō complete works* (1997–[2000], [29] volumes¹⁷), which contains a wide variety of primary texts, including letters, composition notes, and round table discussions), arranged in chronological order and featuring detailed source notes in each volume. Both the source notes, which are the most complete source of bibliographic information on Abe now available, and the principle of chronological order have been helpful for instance in summarizing statistics on how many and which articles Abe published over what period of time in which media. This is particularly useful in the case of group newsletters, which have been collected only in private col-

¹⁶ Examples of features are "The New Japan Literature Association, history and present" (Shin Nihon Bungakukai, rekishi to genzai), Apr.–Jun. 1972; "Rediscovering Hanada Kiyoteru" (H. K. saihakken), Dec. 1984; or "Fifty years post-war and the fiftieth anniversary of the New Japan Literature Association), Jan. 1996.

¹⁷ At the time of writing, the planned supplementary volume is still extant.

lections. The *Complete works* offers a body of texts that is well ordered and voluminous, at least with regard to texts intended for publication. There are some instances of omissions not indicated in the text, for example in roundtable discussions.¹⁸ Not included are unpublished texts dealing exclusively with political matters, independently of the arts.¹⁹ Texts for analysis were chosen according to the following criteria:

- That they are essays in the broad sense: texts that are primarily discursive, no text whose basic mode is fictional narrative or drama; no interviews (including *danwa kiji*: interviews transcribed with the questions omitted, to read like discourse); no texts with joint authorship, no transcriptions of dialogues (*taidan*) or round table discussions (*zadankai*).
- That they concern primarily literature in the sense of texts to be consumed directly by a reading public (nothing dealing primarily with performing or pictorial arts, film or telecommunications), and in tendency based on fictional narrative (rather than fictional drama, or non-fictional modes like journalism, historiography, law etc.), or alternatively dealing with the arts in general in a way that is essential to the understanding of literature. In the case of Abe's travel account on Eastern Europe (III.5.2), aspects of this text dealing with literature or relevant to literature movements have been discussed.
- That it contains statements of agenda, i. e. defines aims or positions with normative pretensions (no pure analysis; no text dealing primarily with a particular author or body of text, limited to a short-term problem or to an organizational question; no purely personal aims not based on a normative definition of creative activity).
- As a rule, relatively sustained texts were preferred (at least five pages in the *Complete works*).

No attempt was made explicitly to limit texts to those connected to a particular movement or group. The analysis is expected to reveal

¹⁸ C. f. for example II. 1.2. The editorial principles state only: "We have postponed [sic: *miawasetai*] passages where Kōbō does not say much." ("Henshū kihon hōshin", in AKZ b 1, p. 1 of the notes.)

¹⁹ Here, the editorial principles state that "works where the theme itself might invite a discriminating interpretation" (*shudai sono mono ga sabetsuteki kaishaku o yūdō suru osore ga aru sakuhin*) have been omitted. (Ibid.)

whether a text is compatible with the aims of groups and movements in which Abe was active at that time.

This text analysis chapter will centre on the following questions: What explicit agenda does each essay specify, and what is the relationship between these agenda and the rhetorically transmitted implicit intentionality of the text (e. g. complementary, supplementary, contradictory, etc.)? How do the essays deal with the relationship of commitment and autonomy, and what definitions of these categories do they imply (for example according to whether institutionalization contributes to autonomy, what kind of institutionalization, and to what extent autonomy is desirable)? To what extent can the essays be said to be non-organic in Bürger's sense, and is there any indication whether this is a deliberate strategy – conversely, how do they generate homogeneity or consistency (intra-textually and inter-textually)? Finally, once again, what factors remain constant, and what changes?

The study concludes by linking this back to the themes of the postwar, asking how Abe's communist commitment and his aesthetic values are connected to the discursive frame of the postwar.

2 BIOGRAPHIC OUTLINE

Abe Kōbō's postwar career can be said to start at the beginning of 1947.²⁰ At the time of the Japanese surrender in September 1945, he was with his parents in Mukden in Manchuria, and the ship on which he and his mother were repatriated finally arrived in Nagasaki at the end of 1946 (his father having died during a typhoid epidemic in the winter of 1945/46). Having briefly accompanied his mother to her home town in Hokkaidō, he returned to the capital to complete his degree in medicine at Tokyo Imperial University, which he eventually did in March 1948. In the meantime, he took an active interest in the blossoming art and literature scene, and it was then that he met the art student Yamada Machiko (1926–1993), whom he married in March of the same year. She became known in her own right under her artist's name Abe Machi, notably (but not exclusively) as an illustrator of his books and later set designer for his plays.

²⁰ Unless otherwise stated, biographic details are based on the biographic table (*nenpyō*) compiled by Tani Shinsuke (Tani 1994).

Abe Kōbō was born in Tokyo in 1924 as Abe Kimifusa, but was taken soon after his birth by his parents to Mukden, where his father had a post as Assistant Professor at the Medical College, at which he had also studied. His mother was active during her time as a student of Japanese literature in at what is now Ochanomizu Women's University in Tokyo in leftwing literature groups, took an interest in the proletarian literature movement, and had a number of works of fiction published. Kimifusa completed his primary and middle school education in Mukden, before being sent to high school at Seijō Gakuen, a reputable Tokyo college, in 1940. There, his German teacher was Abe Rokurō (1904–1957, no relation), known for his co-translation of the Russian essayist Lev Shestov, and his commentaries on Dostoyevski and Nietzsche. Rokurō also commanded the respect of intellectuals of a generation slightly older than Abe Kōbō, and was to be instrumental in getting his postwar literary career started.

Abe's education is marked by interruptions. At the outbreak of the Pacific War in December 1941, he was in Mukden recovering from a lung infection and did not return to school until April 1942. He graduated the following year and was accepted at Tokyo University to study medicine, but was apparently unable to study, spending his time reading literature and philosophy, and, according to Tani, undergoing psychoanalysis²¹ – a detail that should not only be seen as indicative of a personal crisis, but also in the light of the fact that Abe was reportedly interested in specializing in psychiatry. At the end of 1944, hearing rumours that the war was drawing to a close, he obtained leave from school by faking a diagnosis of tuberculosis and together with a friend made his way to Mukden.

This part of Abe's biography resembles and yet differs from typical postwar writers' backgrounds in some interesting ways. The fact that it is so fragmented is by no means unusual, but the breaks are of a different nature from those named for the standard "generations" of Japanese postwar literature. On the one hand, there were the writers of the "postwar faction" (*sengoha*), who were typically involved in pre-war leftwing movements and forced to recant; on the other hand, the "wartime group" (*senchūha*) had in many cases been drafted and sud-

²¹ With Saitō Mokichi (1882–1953), a pioneer of that discipline (and coincidentally a reformer of classical *tanka* poetry).

denly lacked a civilian identity.²² In some ways, colony expatriates like Abe were looked on in a similar way to ex-servicemen by the Japanese civilian population, however. Iida Momo (1926–), a fellow participant with Abe in artists' movements of the very first postwar years (c. f. II. 1.2), remembers in an obituary that mainland returnees and survivors of the suicide squadrons (*tokkōtai*) alike were conspicuous in their behaviour and regarded somewhat warily.²³ Iida even goes so far as to speculate that it was out of a desperate attempt to overcome this feeling of being “*déraciné*” (*derashine*) that Abe turned to communist activism in the 1950s, in search of a spiritual home.²⁴ Accordingly, he effectively degrades Abe's commitment in radical groups to a factor that produced inferior literature, implying that Abe would have done better to concentrate on his real malaise, or “poison” (Iida). While this is somewhat one-sided, Iida certainly points out a possible powerful motivation. While this is not the object of this study, it does illustrate that Abe came to the literary scene as a writer with a powerful motivation and a sense of mission. He also came to it as someone with a deep interest in modern literature and philosophy and with access to the intellectual elites of his time, but with no formal literary education or contacts with literary circles.

Abe came to literary scene as an unconventional outsider, who on the one hand did not find it easy to find acceptance, but who on the other hand was valued by some for the very unconventional nature of his approach. This is remembered by Haniya Yutaka (1909–1997), who himself played an important part in initially helping Abe to get published, in an interview also on the occasion of Abe's death.²⁵ According to Haniya, Abe was completely alone in the literary world, like all true avant-gardists not appreciated by his contemporaries. He credits himself, not without some justification, with having been instrumental in discovering this talent: When Haniya was sent the manuscript of Abe's first novel by Abe Rokurō and decided to give the newcomer his support, he was acting within the programme of the magazine *Kindai bungaku* (Modern literature; KiB)), which he had co-founded (c. f. II. 1.1),

²² For a discussion of the significance of these generations, see below I. 1.4.

²³ Iida 1993, p. 83.

²⁴ Op. cit., p. 87.

²⁵ Haniya 1993.

and which had set itself the aim of finding the new literature for the new postwar age (c. f. I. 1). Hence, Abe is very much associated with the atmosphere of new beginning after 1945, and it is this principle that is addressed by Iida, when he mourns the passing of the “postwar” (*sengo*) as the “age of anonymity” (*mumei jidai*), when Abe and his contemporary Mishima Yukio (1925–1970) became “famous” (*yūmeijin*)²⁶.

The motif of anonymity is simultaneously an allusion to Abe’s very first publication, the Rilke-esque *Poetry collection without names* (*Mumei shishū*)²⁷, a handwritten and mimeographed volume not untypical of the time, which Abe distributed privately around May 1947. Abe’s first professional publication was the short novel *To mark the end of the road* (*Owarishi michi no shirube ni*), the first chapter of which appeared in a commercial journal in February 1948, the whole text being published in October of the same year.²⁸ Drawing on Abe’s first-hand experiences of the social structures and climate of the Manchurian steppes, the narrative reflects on the loss of home through the senses of a stranded Japanese suffering from tuberculosis, who writes a diary as he is kept as a kind of exotic pet by a succession of Chinese warlords who provide him with opium against his pain in return for his conversation.

By the time Abe gained his medical degree, he was so involved in other things that it is not surprising that he did not enter the medical profession. Having employed a narrative mode in his debut novel that is reminiscent of Rilke’s *The notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge* (*Die Aufzeichnungen des Malte Laurids Brigge*), Abe now became interested in the neo-avant-garde approach advocated by Hanada Kiyoteru (1909–1974) and attended the meetings of the Night Society (*Yoru no Kai*), which had been co-initiated by Hanada (c. f. II. 1.3 and III. 2.3). He began applying avant-garde techniques to narrative space and won his first literary awards for stories that employ this approach. The fable-like “The red cocoon” (*Akai mayu*, Dec. 1950)²⁹

²⁶ Iida, op. cit., p. 84.

²⁷ AKZ b 1, p. 221–266.

²⁸ AKZ b 1, p. 271–390. The magazine version bore the title “Mud walls” (*Nendo-bei*), which was the title of the first chapter. The work was later substantially revised and republished in 1965 (AKZ b 19, p. 377–476); for a discussion of the epilogue to the revised version, see III. 1.3.

²⁹ AKZ b 2, p. 492–494.

has a first person narrator recount self-reflexively how his body comes unravelled like a roll of yarn, which goes on independently to make an empty cocoon. The short novel "The crime of S. Karma" (S. Karuma-shi no hanzai, March 1950)³⁰ begins with the title protagonist's business card supplanting him at the office. The first was awarded the Postwar Literature Prize (Sengo Bungakushō), which was closely associated with *Kindai bungaku*, in April 1951, the second received the most prestigious newcomers' prize, the Akutagawa Prize (Akutagawa-Shō) in July of the same year.

By this time, Abe was deeply involved in political activism, having probably been accepted into the Japan Communist Party (JCP) at some point between the two prizes (c. f. II. 2.2). He also joined and helped initiate a rapid succession of artists initiatives, socio-cultural movements, and possibly party organs. These are discussed in detail in Chapter II, but probably the most important of these were connected to workers' literary circles (c. f. in particular II. 2.3), the movement for reportage literature (II. 2.4 and c. f. II. 3.2), and the campaign for a cultural united front (II. 2.4). Initially, he was associated with the radical "mainstream" (*shuryū*) faction of the JCP, but after the rival wings of the "democratic literature" movement reached a reconciliation in 1955 uniting the national writers' league type New Japan Literature Association (Shin Nihon Bungakukai), he found himself in opposition to the new party leadership (whose factions had also realigned the same year). Details of these shifts in alliances (themselves reminiscent of avant-garde experiments with narrative space if one tries to apply categories of 'left' and 'right' to them) are outlined in the following chapters (particularly I. 2.4, II. 2.3, II. 3.1, and II. 3.3). The New Japan Literature Association was not a communist organization, but dominated by Communist writers, and periodically subject to attempts by the party to instrumentalize it. It was before the background of such tensions that a protest by Communist members of New Japan in 1961 against the party leadership's way of forcing through a new party programme led to almost all the protesters being expelled early in 1962. Abe, who was one of the victims, also ceased his active involvement in New Japan and other organization-based movements after this.

³⁰ AKZ b 2, p. 378–451.

On the other hand, 1962 saw the publication of his international breakthrough novel *The woman in the dunes* (*Suna no onna*)³¹, in which a city schoolteacher finds himself trapped in a provincial village society that forces him to take his place at the side of a young widow and perform an absurd labour of shovelling sand as part of a shadow industry that exists in a strange parasitic relationship to the mainstream of society. Here, Abe developed a highly sophisticated form of neo-realism that cunningly hides not only a rich complex of metaphors, but continues his avant-garde technique of opening up unexpected narrative spaces, this time coexisting with a realistic ethnographic gaze turned on Japan. This marks the beginning of the better-known part of Abe's career, whose products have been frequently discussed, and which will be left aside in this study, though it hopes to provide a basis on which the workings of these later novels can be described more precisely in the context of a life's work.

This life's work includes not only prose fiction, but encompasses an impressive variety of media. The most important of these is probably theatre: Abe's first play, *The uniform* (*Seifuku*) was first published in 1954 and staged the following year³². Eventually, Abe went on to develop acting techniques and direct his own theatre troupe, the Abe Kōbō Studio (A. K. Sutajio), which existed between 1973 and 1979. Of the films based on Abe's screenplays, the best known is without a doubt *The woman in the dunes* (1964). However, the first film to based on an Abe screenplay was completed in 1955³³, and he also had several radio and television dramas broadcast (between 1956 and 1964/1959 and 1964 respectively). In addition, he had photographs published and composed and programmed the synthesizer music to one of his plays³⁴. All this is fairly well documented and contributes to the myth of Abe as a 'Renaissance genius', but it is also derived from an avant-garde attitude that programmatically refuses to draw clear dividing lines between media and formal genres.

³¹ AKZ b 16, p. 115–250.

³² Original version, AKZ b 4, p. 455–480, stage version AKZ b 5, p. 27–61 (first published 1971).

³³ *A room with thick walls* (*Kabe atsuki heya*), dir. Kobayashi Masaki. The film took up the controversial theme of the Tokyo war crimes trials and was not allowed to be released until 1959.

³⁴ *The elephant calf is dead* (*Kozō wa shinda*), 1979.

Abe was much less prolific in his production in his later years, writing only two more novels³⁵ between the dissolution of the Abe Studio in 1979 and his death in 1993. Though he kept abreast of current themes in his work up to the time of his death, he no longer seems to have been an important source of literary models from the 1970s on. It might be said that this was because the kind of neo-realism that Abe was committed to developing had gained mainstream acceptance. One indication of this was that whereas Abe was one of the very first intellectual Japanese writers to adopt a science fiction narrative mode in the 1950s³⁶, published the first full-length science fiction novel in Japanese³⁷, and campaigned for science fiction as a vehicle for serious critical literature (c. f. III. 5.4), genre SF began to become established in Japan at the end of the 1950s, after which Abe wrote little that corresponds to the fictions typical of genre science fiction. He continued to play a part, however, in introducing literary and cultural themes into the Japanese discourse such as the French *nouveau roman* in the 1960s³⁸, and Latin American magical realism from the late 1970s³⁹.

³⁵ *The Ark Sakura* (Hakobune Sakuramaru, 1984; AKZ b 27) and *Kangaroo notebooks* (Kangarū nōto; 1991, AKZ b 29).

³⁶ The first recognizably SF story was “The invention of R 62” (R 62 no hatsumei, 1953; AKZ b 3, p. 409–433), in which an unemployed engineer is turned into a “robot” – in fact, since the result is a hybrid of mechanical parts and living tissue, this corresponds exactly to what today would be called a cyborg and has since come to represent the mainstream particularly of Japanese SF.

³⁷ *Inter ice age four* (Daiyon kanpyōki, first serialized 1958–1959; AKZ b 9, p. 9–174). This features a prediction computer plotting to change the course of history, intruding into the present as a kind of “virtual” future, again anticipating many elements of the “virtual reality” topos that like the cyborg became central to mainstream SF in the 1990s (this time to the North American rather than the Japanese variety).

³⁸ C. f. in particular his essay “Writing with an eraser” (Keshigomu de kaku, 1966; AKZ b 20, p. 86–91; discussed under III. 6.2) and his published discussions with the *nouveau roman* authors Alain Robbe-Grillet (1979; AKZ b 26, p. 338–350) and Michel Butor (1972; HNS, p. 62–70. Irmela Hijiya-Kirschnereit (1977) has traced the influences of the *nouveau roman* on Abe’s novel *The ruined map* (Moetsukita chizu, 1967; AKZ b 21, p. 113–311).

³⁹ C. f. in particular the interview “The literature of internal exiles” (Naiteki bōmeisha no bungaku, 1979; AKZ b 26, p. 374–394), and the lecture “García Márquez, inhabitant of the globe” (Chikyūgi ni sumu Garushia Marukesu, 1983; AKZ b 27, p. 122–128).

In a certain way, Abe became a classic author in his own right, very much against his own will⁴⁰, and in that sense, the potential of heterogeneous, discontinuous elements to form a continuous whole proved so great as to become a problem in its own right. In this sense, the issues of new beginning associated with the concepts of the post-war and the avant-garde end up confronting the issues resembling the postmodern slogan of the “end of history”. But this study will begin at the beginning, with the end of the war.

⁴⁰ “When I find my work discussed alongside the classics, I experience the anxiety and dread of one plunging into the black abyss.” (“One step behind lies darkness” / *Issun ushiro wa yami*, 1970; AKZ b 23, p. 24–26).

I VALUES IN POSTWAR (*SENGO*) JAPAN

That the end of the war marks a radical new beginning in the Japanese population's collective consciousness, and that it was widely considered the start of the current period until quite recently, is the main theme of this chapter. The name of Abe Kōbō is associated with it, and his literary debut takes place only a short time after this new beginning. This chapter deals with how the meaning of this beginning was contested, especially within left-wing groups. The object of this is to help locate Abe's position in any given essay within the range of opinions current at the time of publication. As will become apparent from the sections below (and as might be expected), the new values involved recourse to old ones. It will also be seen that such controversies often divided the same political camp, and that conversely certain positions were shared by authors and groups from opposite 'sides'. Just as there was left-wing and right-wing modernism, there was also nationalist and internationalist particularism and universalism. Nationalists could be pacifists, and younger Marxists quarrelled with older ones about the right to individualism.

Abe Kōbō himself is necessarily absent from this chapter, since its purpose is to fix a context for the texts that are the primary object of this study.

1 THE *SENGO* TERM AND THE PRINCIPLE OF THE NEW BEGINNING

A period of history can only be objectively described after it has been declared over. Definitions of a period still current must necessarily be subjective and prescriptive, imposing the author's values on the era in question. A special case are all those periods termed "post-something", which are defined negatively in terms of an extinct other. This is an effective way to achieve consent, until various protagonists develop inevitably conflicting counter-values.

There is much similarity between this succession of eras and the problems surrounding inheritance (whether this concerns a family position, property, or public office). There is discontinuity, marked by conflicts between the generations and between potential heirs; but there is also continuity in the inheritance itself. This structure is reflected directly in the generations issue discussed in subsection 1.4 (the definition of generations), and indirectly in 1.3, which deals with

factions resulting from a disagreement about how the 'inheritance' (Japanese culture) should be treated. An aspect of periodization that becomes apparent only with greater historical distance is that of the succession of sub-periods of the Japanese postwar. Subsection 1.5 reviews how the era was redefined in several stages, having already been declared at an end by some. The section begins with a description of the range of values ascribed to the postwar (1.1) and of the role envisioned for literature within these values (1.2).

1.1 Values Associated with *sengo*

One of the earliest summaries of the history of the term *sengo* was attempted by the critic Senuma Shigeki (1904–88) in a 1963 essay about "The Genealogy of the Postwar Literature Faction", written for the monthly *Bungaku*.¹ At the beginning of his essay, Senuma introduces two positions, whose incompatibility he uses to illustrate how difficult it is, in his view, to define just what *sengo* is. The first is that of Ara Masahito (1913–79), well known as a leading critic in the journal *Kindai bungaku* (Modern literature), founded in January 1946. This magazine is considered the centre of the *sengoha* (postwar faction), whose programme of literary renewal will be dealt with in section 4 of this chapter. Senuma, however, directs his readers' attention to a non-literary aspect, Ara's regretful conclusion that *sengo* ended with the outbreak of the Korean War in June 1950², which triggered fears that the next world war was imminent, bringing to an end the period of a "second youth" (*daini no seishun*), proclaimed by Ara in 1946³. As a representative of the opposite faction, Senuma cites Nakano Yoshio (1922–), also a critic, who in 1956 called for an end to the "postwar period", which he identified with what he saw as a naive abstention from Japan's duty to act as a sovereign nation.⁴

These two positions can be taken to stand for two extremes in a range of values associated with *sengo*, a slogan for open-ended progress for some, for others a name for a necessary but troublesome

¹ Senuma 1963.

² Expressed in the round table discussion "Sengo Bungaku no Sōkessan", in *Kindai bungaku*, Jan. 1953 (Abe/Ara et al. 1953), p. 1.

³ In Ara 1946 a.

⁴ Nakano Yoshio 1956.

period of normalization. In terms of the sociology of literature, it could be said that *sengo* was a key “inter-discursive” term, used by opposing discourses vying to establish their definitions and values in public debate. Viewed from today’s perspective and from outside Japan, it is much easier to refrain from trying to define what *sengo* really is or was and to concentrate instead on summing up the issues associated with the term. This approach must view *sengo* not as the name for a period beginning and ending at a certain point in time, but as an ideological paradigm, whose beginning and end may be subject to controversy.

In the case of *sengo*, there was general consensus about the beginning: noon on August 15., 1945, the time of the Tennō’s radio broadcast announcing the unconditional surrender. This is identified by Carol Gluck as the Japanese equivalent of the German “zero hour”⁵, and “the founding myth of modern Japan”.⁶ That the end of a war is usually an event signalling a new beginning needs no further explanation. The same cannot be said of the end of a “postwar” period, however, and as Gluck points out, the fact that it was still possible to debate about whether the postwar period had finally finished or not in 1991 is characteristic of Japan.⁷

One peculiarity is the prominence of Marxist ideology in postwar Japan, such that the Japan Communist Party (JCP) was arguably one of the most significant institutions determining the ideology of reform, next to the Allied administration authority. As J. Victor Koschmann argues in a 1991 essay, these two institutions shared an interest in social reforms.⁸ The standing of the JCP was reinforced initially by a considerable amount of moral authority, since it was able to point to leaders who had not co-operated with the militarist government and publicly renounced their views (committed *tenkō*), but had spent the war years either in prison (Sano Manabu and Nabeyama Sadachika) or in exile (Nosaka Sanzō). Nosaka (1892–) had been in Moscow and more recently at Mao’s base in Yan’an, and returned to Japan in January 1946 to become the JCP’s first major postwar leader.

⁵ Gluck 1991, p. 65.

⁶ Op. cit., p. 66.

⁷ Op. cit., p. 73. It is only the ideology of the new beginning whose longevity is peculiar to Japan. For Germany, Gluck notes, the question of national guilt for the extermination of Jews is equally tenacious, for the United States the problem of racism.

⁸ Koschmann 1991, p. 164.

The goal of a bourgeois-democratic revolution (*burujoa minshushugi kakumei*) was central to these values. Victor Koschmann has argued that “the postwar policies of the allied occupation and the Japan Communist Party converged on a program of democratic revolution, and that this convergence powerfully determined the parameters of literary and political discourse in the early postwar period.”⁹ The term for democratic revolution itself was not, of course taken from the liberal democratic principles propounded by the US administrators, but was one type of revolution catered for in the Marxist categorization of historical events. It was the term for a revolution directed against imperialism and monopolistic capitalism and involving parliamentary democracy, as opposed to a socialist revolution, which led directly to a socialist society. These two types of revolution form the basis of the “1932 Theses”¹⁰, an analysis published by the Communist International (Comintern) in that year, analysing Japan’s state of historical development and predicting future developments as a basis of Communist Party policy. The “Theses”, which had defined the task of the Japan Communist Party as “the struggle for the rapid development of the bourgeois-democratic revolution into a socialist revolution”¹¹, had not been revised. The reforms carried out by the Allies between 1945 and 1947 could therefore be readily interpreted as a democratic revolution and the next stage deferred to some indefinite point in the future.

A further characteristic of the postwar democratic revolution is the leading role assigned to culture, and specifically to literature, in helping to fashion the new peaceful and democratic Japan. The first significant literary movement to announce a programme in postwar Japan was that for democratic literature (*minshushugi bungaku*), proclaimed by the New Japan Literature Association (Shin Nihon Bungakukai) in December 1945. This was launched by veterans of the proletarian literature (*purorotaria bungaku*) movement of the 1920s and 1930s such as Kurahara Korehito (1902–1991), Nakano Shigeharu (1902–1979), and Miyamoto Yuriko (1899–1951) and her husband

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ C. f. JCP 1962, p. 36–68 (Japanese, 1932 version); Beckmann/Okubo 1969, p. 332–351 (English based on various Japanese versions).

¹¹ Quoted from JCP 1962, p. 51.

Miyamoto Kenji (1908–). “Democratic literature” was seen both as the resumption of a programme interrupted by militarist repression, and as a new beginning. Though many and perhaps most of the participants did not feel that the 1920s tradition was up to date, there does not seem to have been an alternative organizational model for a literature movement to the artists’ leagues KOPF and NAPF.¹² In

¹² The question of movement theory was an important issue in the Present Society, in which Abe Kōbō played a prominent role between 1952 and 1957 (c. f. II. 2.4). For an overview of the history of the proletarian literature movement in Japan, I have relied mainly on Shea 1964.

The Japanese name for NAPF (founded in March 1928) was Zen Nihon Musansha Geijutsu Renmei (All Japan Federation of Proletarian Artists), but its acronym (read *nappu* in Japanese) was derived from its Esperanto name Nippona Proleta Artista Federacio, the order being changed possibly in allusion to RAPP (Russian Association of Proletarian Writers), founded in 1923. At the end of 1928, the name was changed to Zen Nihon Musansha Geijutsu Dantai Kyōgikai (All Japan Council of Proletarian Art Groups), but the acronym, which in any case was not a complete translation of the Japanese name) was kept (Shea, p. 200).

KOPF (read *koppu*) stood for Federacio de Proletaj Kulturorganizoj (Shea, p. 205) or Kultura Organizoi de Proleta Federacio en Japanujo (Keene 1984, p. 625). The Japanese name, Nihon Puroretaria Bunka Renmei, translates as Japan Proletarian Culture Federation, but as Keene (ibid.) points out, variations of both the Japanese and the Esperanto versions exist. It is conceivable that the lack of standardization was due to the fact that the movement at this stage suffered under severe repression. KOPF was formed in November 1931, after NAPF was dissolved, and was disbanded in May 1934.

The proletarian literature movement had crystallized around the magazine *Tane maku hito* (The Sower), first published in 1921. Shea describes it as being “strongly colored as a magazine of cultural enlightenment” (Shea, p. 76), aimed at workers but primarily written by well-meaning intellectuals, though literature by worker-writers, which had started to appear around the time of the First World War, was also included. Theories for the movement dealing with such questions as the relationship between the proletariat and the intellectuals of bourgeois provenance began to be formulated, but the movement still united Communists, anarchists and syndicalists (p. 71–87). This was still the case in the movement’s first organization, the Japan Proletarian Literary Arts League (JPLAL – Nihon Puroretaria Bungei Renmei), formed in December 1925, which emphasized class partisanship more than its informal predecessors, but was not exclusively dominated by Marxists (p. 134–141). Marxist hegemony began at the second General Meeting, dominated by a group of young Marxists (one of them Nakano Shigeharu), under whose influence the league was reorganized according to artistic genres, in keeping with Leninist principles, which were interested in giving the communist parties a more active role in shaping proletarian culture. The organization was simultaneously renamed the Japan Proletarian Arts League (JPAL – Nihon Puroretaria Geijutsu Renmei) (p. 141–142).

effect, the movement was dominated by, but by no means limited to Communists, and was able to win the support of a number of eminent authors without even a left-wing background, such as Shiga Naoya (1883–1971) and Masamune Hakuchō (1879–1962). The initial plan for corporate membership (characteristic of a “league”) was abandoned at the time of founding, though it was again an issue between 1955 and 1964 in the form of individual membership available only through local branches. C. f. II. 1.1 and II. 3.1.

At the same time, however, a traditionalist attitude is displayed in what might be called the first manifesto for a communist literary programme, published by Kurahara Korehito in two instalments in a daily newspaper just two months after the inception of Allied rule.¹³ The article was entitled “Towards a New Literature” (*Atarashii bungaku e no shuppatsu*), but the programme projected in it was a resumption of the tradition of proletarian culture. Kurahara criticized the literature written since the Manchurian Incident of 1932 for going into what might be termed inner exile, turning from a realistic representation of social conditions to a subjective mode.¹⁴ A culture suppressed since the 1930s, wrote Kurahara, was now rising again. The task of writers, he demanded, was to share the life of the people (*minshū*), both lending them their voice and instructing them.¹⁵ This is not the call for a radical new beginning, but for the resumption of a tradition (albeit a revolutionary one). Hence, at this point, there was a division between those who saw cultural revolution primarily in terms of a specific traditionally defined class culture, and those who were fundamental about revolution as a radical historical break, and therefore unable to be specific about what it would bring.

But the democratic literature movement also included those who, while having a background in the proletarian literature movement, were sceptical of the traditional dogmas of revolution. The most important base for individualistic Marxists was the magazine *Kindai bungaku*, which has come to be considered the most representative new force in literary criticism before 1950. In that year, the magazine suspended publication for four months. Though it existed until

¹³ In *Asahi shinbun*, 10.–11. Nov. 1945; cited from Kurahara 1966–3, p. 3–7.

¹⁴ Op. cit., p. 4.

¹⁵ Op. cit., p. 5–6.

1964, it has been said to be relatively insignificant after 1950.¹⁶ The leading critics and authors of *Kindai bungaku* were typically in their 30s and had been to some extent involved in the left-wing political and literary movements of the 1920s and 1930s, had been arrested and had bowed to superior force, recanting their beliefs, while finding a way to adhere to them privately. Most of these men were admirers of the “proletarian” writers who had not recanted, and most were simultaneously members of the New Japan Literature Association, while adhering to a more individualistic, subjectivist literary programme than that advocated by the New Japan mainstream. They formed the hard core of what became known as the *sengoha* (postwar faction).

1.2 The Significance of Literature in *sengo*

Literature played an important part in the ideology of *sengo*. Of course, it is always a function of literature to operate with ideologies, but in the ideology of *sengo*, it was explicitly given a vanguard role. This is shown, for example, when Sasaki Kiichi concludes from a political event (the failure of the 1960 protests against the ratification of the renewed peace treaty with the USA) that postwar literature was “a phantom”.¹⁷ That this should have been so is connected to the central ideological terms associated with *sengo*: peace and democracy.

In domestic politics, as Carol Gluck points out, the rhetoric of Japanese politicians stressed peace and culture and avoided all mention of the state.¹⁸ There are two ways of interpreting this. Either it is seen in purely aesthetic terms (and deprived of a sociopolitical function), or it usurps politics at the grassroots level, aspiring to bypass institutionalized politics.

The boom in magazines after 1945 has frequently been pointed out. Alone during the eight months following the Japanese surren-

¹⁶ This is the opinion expressed by Koschmann (1996, p. 230). More general doubts have also been cast on the standard of the criticism both in *Kindai bungaku* and the New Japan Literature Association’s organ *Shin Nihon bungaku* (c. f. for example Miura 1990, p. 8). Abe Kōbō later judged the standard of the criticism in *Kindai bungaku* very negatively (c. f. II. 1.1).

¹⁷ “‘Postwar Literature’ was a phantom” was the title of an essay written by Sasaki for the magazine *Gunzō* (Sasaki 1962).

¹⁸ C. f. Gluck 1993, p. 68–69.

der, according to Gluck, a total of 434 magazines were founded or revived.¹⁹ Jay Rubin, discussing the role of Allied censorship, counts 110 magazines launched or re-launched between 1945 and 1949.²⁰ While only a tiny minority of these publications would have been devoted exclusively to literature, a large number carried literature amongst other things. In his history of postwar publishing, Tadokoro Tarō describes the period between 1945 and 1948 as the golden age of the *sōgō zasshi* (general or “synthetic” magazines), periodicals that, according to his definition, followed a particular sociopolitical programme and covered all aspects of society, including the publication of literature and literary criticism, from the point of view of this programme. They tended to be left-wing, and when the Cold War began to intensify from about 1948, the Allied administration made use of its authority to censure unwelcome opinion and dismiss editors. In addition, a publishing recession set in in 1949, and of the *sōgō zasshi* started since the end of the war, only two survived into the 1950s.²¹ By this time, however, the values associated with *sengo bungaku* had been established.

The emphasis in the cultural programme of the JCP was on the creation of a broad popular front²² including non-party members. This is reflected in the invitation to contribute to the New Japan Literary Association’s organ *Shin Nihon bungaku*, extended to all writers who had not collaborated with the wartime regime, to contribute to the magazine. At the same time, the organization was dominated by Communists of a specific creed, which was again in conflict with the approach in particular of younger sympathizers, who took their departure from individual subjectivity. They all shared the view that the culture of the “new Japan” needed to be revolutionized, and that literature was the appropriate means to achieve this, but their views on subjectivity were so different that it did not even permit a com-

¹⁹ Gluck 1991, p. 65.

²⁰ Rubin 1985, p. 74.

²¹ Tadokoro 1976, p. 7–9.

²² The term popular front characterizes a coalition of legal anti-capitalist parties, in contrast to a united front, which is not tied to formalized bodies and legal means. The latter is designed for the struggle against a system that is rejected as such, or a foreign (e. g. imperial) power, and was the strategy adopted by the JCP after 1950.

mon concept of culture, let alone a strategy how it was to be cultivated. The veterans' culturalist idea of a homogenous class culture that needed to be fostered was incompatible, at least at this stage, with *Kindai bungaku's* approach that the individual human should be the starting point.

The literary debates among left-wing critics of various factions, many of whom were not Communists, though sympathetic to the revolutionary cause and the popular front, were reflected in the range of meanings of terms like revolution, people, or masses, and hence differing views on the possibility of solidarity and culture shared across class divides. Hence, the proletarian faction publicly criticized their more individualist and sceptical colleagues, but no attempt was made to expel anyone from the party or the association at this stage. Nor was there any talk of a possible split or expulsions at this stage. However, the divide was not only between factions, but also between generations, so that ousting the rebels would have meant giving up 'parental' authority over the 'heirs'.

Since the question of subjectivity played such a prominent role in the controversy, it is all the less surprising that literature became a primary battle ground. As a reaction to their isolation during the war, the younger writers tended to stress the role of the individual, both in the creative process and in political responsibility. This involved a fundamental difference over the fundamentals of human nature, which many of the younger writers felt needed to be reassessed. This led to heated debates, though until 1950 these had no practical consequences for the activities and forms of organization of the left-wing literature movement.

1.3 Sengo as a Faction

The "postwar faction" was not so much a movement in its own right as a tendency within the democratic literature movement, contesting certain of the older leaders' aims. However, it is usually given greater weight in literary history than the parent movement.

Matsubara Shin'ichi (1940–), a critic born later than the members of the postwar faction, begins a 1977 encyclopaedia article²³

²³ "Sengoha bungaku", in NKiBDJ, vol. 4.