

Evolving Dreams: Exploring the Japanese Encounter with French Surrealism

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## **INTRODUCTION**

“Poetic Surrealism...has focused its efforts up to this point on re-establishing dialogue in its absolute truth, by freeing both interlocutors from any obligation of politeness...The words, the images are only so many springboards for the mind of the listener.”

-André Breton, “*Manifesto of Surrealism*” 1924

Surrealism, perhaps more so than any other cultural movement, resists being circumscribed into any singular description or unified set of criteria. What surrealism is and what qualifies as “surrealist” is ambiguous, as the movement has manifested in a number of forms, both creative (literature, art, film) and theoretical (political thought, philosophy, etc.), in diverse locations and at various times throughout history. For some sense of direction, I intuitively turn to the words of the movement’s original leader, André Breton. His conception of surrealism as a *dialogue* in the epigraph suggests the fluidity and dynamic nature of the movement, and also alludes to the various points of view that it brings together. Surrealism can be imagined as a continuously evolving conversation among authors and artists not only with themselves, but also with the other (by way of dreams, the unconscious, the unknown, etc.) in order to establish an “absolute truth.” Although I open with Breton’s remarks, his words here (and elsewhere in this study) will serve only as a “springboard” for listening to other voices.

This thesis will focus on the surrealist dialogue that transpired between France and Japan over the course of the twentieth century. In 1920s Paris, Breton and his comrades initiated their discourse primarily through poetry and theoretical writings. Above all, the founding French surrealists wanted to free the mind from restrictive modes of thinking, which they saw as tied to oppressive social and political structures. Their avant-garde techniques, aiming to enact a total transformation of life, spread around the world in the following years. Despite vast physical and cultural disparities with France,

Japan's authors and artists were especially transfixed with surrealist thought. Of all the countries in Asia, Japan was the most receptive to French surrealism. Although it was at first seen as eccentric and foreign, a passing interest of small, isolated groups of authors and intellectuals, by 1936, over 500 poets and painters in Tokyo considered themselves "surrealist," a fact that Breton himself was surprised to learn (Linhartová 4).

Undoubtedly, French surrealism resonated with Japanese authors and artists and was conducive to the development of their own artistic innovation.

The transfer of French surrealism to Japan marks not only an exchange of literary ideas and styles, significant in itself, but also an interaction of two vastly different cultures and languages. Such an encounter offers a valuable opportunity to reflect on surrealism as a movement, as well as on the multitude of forces implicated in international, creative communication. As Miryam Sas has noted, surrealism is an especially interesting and challenging movement to look at cross-culturally since it "breaks apart, explicitly and at its initiating moment, clear and bound conceptions of language, poetry, and the transmissibility of meaning...refram[ing] the relation between content and consciousness" (2). While human nature gravitates towards the resolution of contradiction, surrealism, as Sas underlines, insists on illogic and discontinuity. To compare such a body of thought in two different cultures will undoubtedly lead to more rupture, as differences between French and Japanese surrealism emerge, but will also offer shadows of connection when their visions overlap.

While there is a wealth of information and resources on French literary surrealism, literary surrealism in Japan has been documented and analyzed in a small, but growing body of scholarly work. Most recently, Miryam Sas's *Fault Lines: Cultural*

*Memory and Japanese Surrealism* examines the movement's ties to France, and emphasizes through close textual readings, how the Japanese poets used their unique perspectives in their poetic explorations. Likewise Věra Linhartová's *Dada et Surréalisme au Japon*, written in French, provides translations and a comprehensive overview of the avant-garde poets in Japan during the 1920s and 1930s. Although more concerned with the visual arts, John Clark's *History of Japanese Surrealism* chronicles the beginnings of the movement in literature and explains the political circumstances out of which it emerged. Hosea Hirata's *The Poetry and Poetics of Nishiwaki Junzaburō* and John Solt's *Shredding the Tapestry of Meaning: The Poetry and Poetics of Kitasosno Katue (1902-1978)* each profile an author who was influential in the growth of surrealism in Japan, while offering insight into Japanese modern poetry as a whole. All of these books contribute to the gradual uncovering of the surrealist literary experience in Japan.

What I aim to do in this study is to investigate how literary surrealism traveled through time and space: from its inception in Paris during the 1920s to its infiltration into contemporary Japanese texts. In tracing this evolution, I hope to demonstrate how Japanese authors have both cited and reinterpreted the ideas of the original French surrealists in their works. This will entail a historical overview of both the French and Japanese surrealist movements, a critical analysis of their cultural exchange, and finally a thematic reading of two modern Japanese texts in relation to the poetics of French surrealism.

The first part of this thesis will be dedicated to outlining the histories of both the French and Japanese movements. How and in what context did French surrealism transfer to Japan? Why did Japanese artists identify so strongly with surrealist ideas and

principles? In order to answer these questions, I will begin by following the birth of the movement in Paris, tracking its inception after World War I, to its experimentation with different poetic processes like automatic writing, to the direct articulation of the surrealist agenda. Even though conflicting opinions fostered tensions within Breton's group, a sentiment of exaltation at the prospect of *liberating* the rational self helped to coalesce a collective identity. Surrealism's message of liberation was carried over to Japan, but immersed into a completely different cultural setting. Modernization taking place in this country during the 1920s and 30s was reflected in the avant-garde literature, which undermined the traditional literary establishment known as the *shidan*. French surrealism, introduced and developed through coterie journals, provided another aesthetic outlet for the Japanese to respond to the changes taking place around them. Although surrealism emerged out of different circumstances in France and Japan, in both locations, a desire for otherness and a sense of renewal was crucial to the movement's growth.

The second section of this thesis will approach the Japanese encounter with French surrealism from a critical point of view, considering how the movements are positioned in relation to one another. Critiques of Japanese surrealism as imitation of the French offer an exemplary manifestation of the way in which the non-West avant-garde is judged primarily through its relation to the West, and not with respect to its own tradition. As such, Japanese surrealism will be used to open up a discussion on the Eurocentric definition of avant-garde and the limits it imposes on creative expression in the Third World. In addition to representing an intersection between the avant-garde of the East and West, this cultural exchange also illustrates a convergence of texts and languages. Thus, the importation of French surrealist poems into Japan will be used as a

case to contemplate how literary texts in general influence one another, and furthermore what impact the process of translation has on this influence. In contrast to the charges of imitation and illegitimacy, these analyses will highlight the agency and creativity that the Japanese authors had in adopting surrealism from France.

The final section of this thesis will observe how two modern Japanese authors have incorporated and modified the ideas of the founding French surrealists in their narratives. Yasanari Kawabata's novella "House of the Sleeping Beauties" and Haruki Murakami's full-length novel *Hard-Boiled Wonderland and the End of the World* are chosen for this investigation because they both represent significant contributions to modern Japanese literature and surrealist elements are decipherable in their themes and styles. At the same time, however, these two works are vastly different and reveal the range of what can be classified as "Japanese surrealist literature." While Kawabata's writing preserves a sense of traditional Japanese culture--in its treatment of nature and old age, for example--Murakami's work is void of any such cultural specificity, referring most often to aspects of Western life.

Despite these differences, however, both of these works display ties to the surrealist movement as it was imagined by Breton's group. Kawabata and Murakami recast the poetic themes and techniques of the French surrealists--in particular, eroticism, unconscious, and obscurity--into their narratives in such a way that reflects their individual trajectories as writers. Thus, I will explore how these elements function in the texts and how they modify the program of French surrealism. This analysis will demonstrate how Murakami and Kawabata have adapted surrealist poetics into an approach of literary fiction used to depict and contemplate the nature of the human mind.

The Japanese encounter with French literary surrealism is an important example of how a system of thought and aesthetic practice can move and change over time. It reveals how one culture can reconfigure a movement that originated in another, establishing an international dialogue that stimulates the imagination and encourages creative production. Surrealism, embedded in the world of dreams, provides an extremely vivid and fluid framework, through which to observe an evolution of language and ideas.

## **CHAPTER 1: A HISTORY OF SURREALISM IN FRANCE AND JAPAN**

“[T]he history of surrealism,” the French philosopher Maurice Blanchot writes in his essay “Tomorrow at Stake,” “is only of scholarly interest, particularly if the conception of history is not modified by its subject” (407). Here, Blanchot is alluding to the complexity of surrealism that problematizes linear narration. Surrealism, according to Blanchot, is not an artistic movement but rather “a pure practice of existence...in a determinate temporal modality” (407). In other words, surrealism does not operate within traditional dimensions of time: futurity and all of its potential hold an essential position that informs both past and present. The tomorrow of surrealism is therefore just as important then as the today of surrealism. And consequently, attempts to historicize the movement, articulate it in terms of a series of sequential events or facts, are often reductive or overly simplistic, and thus “only of scholarly interest.” For Blanchot then, surrealism challenges how we categorize and experience temporality, and as such, demands a *modification* of the concept of history. Exactly what such a modification entails is never explicitly laid out in this essay, but certainly it would have to represent time as a force that unravels in multiple directions.

It is thus, in acknowledging this difficulty of tracing a linear surrealist history, that I will discuss its development in France and Japan during the early twentieth century.<sup>1</sup> In this chapter, I will outline the major surrealist initiatives that took place in both countries and indicate the particular social and political circumstances under which they occurred. Keeping in mind Blanchot’s comments, this will necessitate a brief consideration of the writers and thinkers that preceded and influenced the surrealists, as

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<sup>1</sup> Miryam Sas also discusses Blanchot’s comments on history, time, and surrealism in the introduction to *Fault Lines*. See pages 11-12.

well a reflection on how the surrealists changed literary conventions for those that would come after them. Surprisingly, Japanese surrealism did not appear long after its Western counterpart. To the contrary, any belatedness or delay of Japanese surrealism was relatively minimal, a testament to the advancements of the modern world and the increasing ease of international communication and mass media during the 1920s. In fact, discourses of modernity and modernism run deep throughout the histories of both French and Japanese surrealism, and will prove especially illuminating in considering why the Japanese were so attracted to the motifs of French surrealism.

### **The Birth of French Surrealism**

Like any artistic movement, French surrealism was a product of the historical and cultural forces leading up to and surrounding it. The origins of surrealism can be situated within the Parisian avant-garde of the early twentieth century, as an offshoot of the exuberant but short-lived Dadaist movement. Launched in Zurich by the poet Tristan Tzara, Dada formed in opposition to World War I and the bourgeois principles that were believed to be responsible for it. Emphasizing meaninglessness, Dadaists, through their “anti-art,” sought to expose the limitations of logical thought and rationalism. Their spontaneous activities were intended to challenge the public order, often taking the form of manifestations or protests. Around 1919, Dada spread to Paris where it was embraced by the writers of the review *Littérature*, which included André Breton, Philippe Soupault, and Louis Aragon. The anarchistic ideas of Dada provided a kind of poetic remedy to the disillusionment experienced by these young poets following the war (Bonnet 44).

However, Breton soon became frustrated with what he saw as the movement's nihilistic tendencies and began to seek out a more proactive, constructive response to the radical changes taking place within French society as well as around the world.<sup>2</sup> He and his comrades thus revised the principles of Dada, drawing from a number of other literary and philosophical resources, to lay the foundations for surrealism.<sup>3</sup> Nonetheless, it is important to note that the French surrealists did not see poetry or art as ends in themselves. As Maurice Nadeau writes in his seminal *History of Surrealism*:

The movement was envisaged by its founders not as an artistic school, but as a means of knowledge, a discovery of continents which had not yet been systematically explored: the unconscious, the marvelous, the dream, madness, hallucinatory states—in short, if we add the fantastic and the marvelous as they occurred throughout the world, the other side of the logical decor. The final goal remained the reconciliation of two hitherto warring realms: man and the world. (Nadeau 80)

In this way, the French surrealists were driven by an exciting quest for otherness, for new ways of knowing and perceiving that stemmed from the avant-garde principles of the Dada movement.

Paradoxically, the surrealist pursuit for the unexpected or the inexplicable often resembled a scientific experiment, involving calculated research and analysis. For example, the French surrealists investigated automatic writing or *écriture automatique* as a tool to liberate the mind from inhibition and reason. During this process, the individual, induced into a trance-like hypnosis, would transcribe his thoughts exactly as they

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<sup>2</sup> In the section “Après Dada” of his novel *Les Pas Perdu*, Breton explains his decision for abandoning Dada: “If I abstained, last year, from participating in the manifestations organized by Dada at the Galerie Montaigne, it was because this mode of activity already no longer attracted me...because I decided to avoid anything that assumes the mask of such convenience” (75).

<sup>3</sup> Arthur Rimbaud's insistence on cosmic knowledge and his notion of “le dérèglement de tous les sens” (“the derangement of all the senses”), as well as the Comte de Lautremont's conception of art as a collective venture were very influential on the surrealists (San Juan Jr. 31). Likewise the poetic theories of Stéphane Mallarmé and Guillaume Apollinaire—who first used the term “surrealist” in 1917--provided models for their own writings.

materialized, without the oppressive filter of consciousness. In 1920, Breton and Soupault published the first collection of automatic verse, intended more as an experiment than actual poetry, in *Les Champs Magnetiques*. In addition to automatic writing, the surrealists also sought access to the unconscious through dream analysis and free association. The influence of Freud's theories of psychoanalysis is very much apparent in these techniques, which attempted to conjure up repressed fears and desires related to death, sexuality, and violence. As their diverse methodology again suggests, the surrealists were not only interested in creative expression, but also inciting a total revolution of human experience.

This path towards revolution was riddled by yet another contradiction: even though the surrealists advocated spontaneity and imagination, their movement was largely self-willed and driven by deliberate doctrine. In 1924, Breton released the first *Manifesto of Surrealism* together with a collection of prose entitled *Poisson soluble*. By this time, Breton had emerged as the locus around which the surrealism found most of its life force (he was called the "Pope of Surrealism" by his detractors). Serving as a sort of official constitution, the Manifesto sketched out the beliefs and objectives of the movement, but also accounted for the obstacles it faced. It is a document that is at once historical, autobiographical, theoretical, and declaratory. Central to the Manifesto is Breton's discussion of the nature of the poetic image (first proposed by Reverdy in 1918),<sup>4</sup> as well as his emphasis on the capacity of imagination and dreams to break down

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<sup>4</sup> In the March 1918 issue of the journal *Nord-Sud*, Pierre Reverdy first proposed what would become a major principle of surrealism: "The image is a pure creation of the mind. It is born not of comparison, but rather by the bringing together of two more or less distant realities. The more distant and true the two realities brought together, the stronger the image—and the more emotional power and poetic reality it will have." In the first *Manifesto of Surrealism*, Breton reformulates Reverdy's theory of the image, emphasizing the fact that this convergence of two "distant realities" cannot be premeditated, but rather

the barriers of reality and lead to a broader understanding of the self. Breton also gives a double definition of surrealism, employing the format of an actual dictionary:

SURREALISM, *n.* Pure psychic automatism with which one proposes to express the real process of thought, either orally or in writing, or in any other manner. Thought's dictation, in the absence of any control exercised by reason, outside any esthetic or moral concerns.

ENCYCL. *Philos.* Surrealism rests on the belief in the superior reality of certain forms of hitherto neglected associations, in the omnipotence of dreams, in the disinterested play of thought. It tends banish, once and for all, any other psychic mechanisms and to replace them in the resolution of the principal problems of existence. Have professed to absolute surrealism Messieurs Aragon, Baron, Boiffard, Breton, Carrive, Crevel, Delteil, Desnos, Éluard, Gérard, Limbour, Malkine, Morise, Naville, Noll, Péret, Picon, Soupault, and Vitrac. (*Manifesto of Surrealism*, 26)

The same year that the Manifesto was released, 1924, a Bureau for Surrealist Research was established in Paris. The purpose of this institution was to unite the French surrealists and promote their projects through activities such as distributing pamphlets and flyers to the public. The Bureau represents just one of many later attempts, including Breton's *Second Manifesto of Surrealism*, to coalesce a collective surrealist identity. Indeed as it attracted more enthusiasts, French surrealism became an extremely well organized movement that demanded a certain discipline from its members. In the early 1930s, meetings were held everyday at six o'clock in the same café, where everyone would order the same beverage (in the summer Pernod, in the winter mandarin Curaçao) (Caws 20). In spite of these formalities, however, the surrealists remained open to continual reinvention and experimentation. They may not have had a clear vision of where they

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must come about organically and automatically. He likewise stresses that the value of the image is based on the emotional inner response, "l'étincelle" (the spark) that the image evokes from the subject, which is directly proportionate to the difference between the two elements being paired (*Manifestos of Surrealism*).

were going, but they were committed to the collaborative search, convinced, as Breton affirms in *Les Pas Perdus*, “that poetry must lead somewhere” (47).

Another defining aspect of French surrealism was its political affiliations. The surrealist objectives were, in many ways, derivative and parallel to the Marxist revolution. In 1926, Breton, Aragon, and Éluard, among others, joined the French Communist Party, believing that their poetic expression was inseparable from social engagement. However, such an openly political stance, binded as it was in the “constraints of reality,” was a source of division for the surrealist members. Antonin Artaud was, in particular, very critical of the adherence to Communism and was eventually excluded from the rest of the group. In 1924, Breton founded the new journal *Le Surréalisme au service de la révolution*, which included a mix of poetry, artwork, and ideological, socialist texts. Yet the surrealist relationship to the communists would essentially be a precarious one, alternating between alliance and detachment in the coming years.

Although I have focused primarily on the developments of surrealism as exhibited through poetry and literature in France, surrealism would inspire all forms of including painting, photography, and film in all parts of the world. This is evidenced by the fact that 14 countries were represented at the International Surrealist Exhibition held in Paris in 1938, which despite its success, is also the unofficial marker of surrealism’s end. In the following years, surrealism would continue to exist but with a diminished energy and a looser organization. Again I will turn to the words of Nadeau to explain the incredible global impact of surrealism:

Surrealism had exploded the nationalized compartments of art. It crossed frontiers. No previous artistic movement, including romanticism, has had this international influence. It has been the heady nourishment of the best artists in every country, the reflection of a period that, on the artistic level as well, was to envisage its problems on a worldwide scale. (Nadeau 43)

The international expansion of surrealism can thus be thought of in conjunction with the greater trends of globalization, as a product of an increasing contact and awareness of other nations. Japan was among the many countries where surrealism thrived. As I will show in the following sections, the beginning of Japanese surrealism, like that of French surrealism also sprung from a yearning for change. However, this impulse was responding to a completely different set of cultural, historical, and political circumstances.

### **Introduction of Surrealism in Japan**

While accounts of French surrealism generally begin with its evolution out of Dada, Japanese surrealism, while associated with Dada, began primarily as a foreign importation. Thanks to Japanese writers and intellectuals who meticulously read and translated French, surrealism swiftly entered the local poetic conversation. As early as 1925, translations of French surrealist works appeared in Japanese anthologies and literary journals. One of the first examples can be found in the Horiguchi Daigaku's comprehensive survey of French poetry entitled *Gekka no ichigun* (Gatherings by Midnight), in which is included various poems from the surrealists Phillipe Soupault and Goll (Solt 47). Likewise, the magazine *Bungei tanbi* was the first periodical to publish

French surrealist poetry: translations of Éluard, Aragon, and Breton appeared alongside commentaries written by Toshio Ueda and his younger brother, Tamotsu. In these notes, the elder Ueda is quick to lament the shortcomings of the modern literary scene in Japan, as compared to that in France: “There is no naturalist movement of the novel as there is in France, and no symbolist movement as in French poetry... We want to create art that fits the times. If not, existence is unrewarding” (As qtd. in Solt 48). Here, Ueda credits France with genuinely innovative creation to which Japan should aspire, stressing his native country’s need to seek out more forward-thinking artistic endeavors. Surrealism, for Ueda and many others, would offer a solution to the sense of literary paralysis in Japan.

One of the most prominent Japanese scholars and translators of French literature was Shûzo Takiguchi. His 1928 essay, “On the Poetics of Surrealism” offers an in-depth analysis of Breton’s *Manifesto of Surrealism* and is one of the earliest attempts on the part of the Japanese to engage with French surrealist principles. Takiguchi had an ongoing correspondence with Breton, and even went to visit him in Paris in 1958 (see fig. 1). He also participated in *L’échange surréaliste* [original title in French], a Japanese journal that fostered collaboration between the French and Japanese surrealists by soliciting and distributing their texts and artwork.<sup>5</sup> Although the Takiguchi-Breton relationship and *L’échange surréaliste* are rare instances of direct contact between

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<sup>5</sup> Issues of *L’échange surréaliste* included poems, some of which had not yet been published in France, from Éluard and Breton sent directly to the editor Toba Shigeru (Sas 25).

Japanese and French surrealists, they reveal the tangible ties that connected the Parisian surrealist center to Tokyo.<sup>6</sup>



Fig. 1. Shūzo Takiguchi and André Breton in Breton's library, their first meeting, Paris 1958; Miryam Sas, *Fault Lines: Cultural Memory and Japanese Surrealism*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999). Print. 104.

Indeed, coterie magazines and translation played a pivotal role in the development of Japanese surrealism. *Shobi \* majutsu \* gakusetsu* (Rose\* Magic\* Theory), considered the first surrealist journal in Japan, was founded in 1927 by Katue Kitasono and the Ueda brothers. While the magazine published translated poems of French surrealists, it also made a concerted effort to produce *original* Japanese works. A former member of the Dadaist magazine *GE\*GJMGGAM\*PRRR\*GYMGEM*, Kitasono

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<sup>6</sup> Yamanaka Chiru (who later adopted the “French name” Yamanake Tiroux) was also known to have corresponded regularly with Paul Éluard. As a result of their relationships with the French poets, Chiru and Takiguchi were included in the 1938 *Dictionnaire abrégé du surréalisme* published in Paris (Clark 12).

encouraged Japanese authors to experiment with different techniques and subjects, and to find their own poetic voice within the surrealist framework. In his essay “Recollections of Rose, Magic, Theory,” Kitasono provides a useful summary of the surrealist circles of 1920s Japan and explains the singularity of the SMG group:

The *surrealist* movement at this time was divided into our SMG group and the Fukuiku taru kafu yo [O Fragrant fireman] group. Both started with a connection to Professor Nishiwaki Junzaburō at Keio University. Among the Fukuiku taru kafu yo group, some were loyal to Breton’s doctrine, but the SMG group was more enthusiastic about opening up a world of specifically Japanese *surrealism*. And so the movement of *surrealists*... was first published in Japan in the magazine SMG. (As qtd. in Solt 52)

As one can see from this passage, Nishiwaki was a central figure in the cultivation of surrealist thought in Japan.<sup>7</sup> Although he never officially identified himself as a surrealist and would later oppose certain surrealist notions, he and Takiguchi were perhaps the closest to Breton’s equivalents in Japan. Likewise, this excerpt also reveals a crucial tension underlying the emergence of surrealism in Japan, which was created by, on one hand, an adherence and fidelity to the French brand of surrealism (represented by the O Fragrant fireman group), and on the other, a desire to explore “a specifically Japanese surrealism” (represented by the SMG group). Yet even in their efforts to affirm a unique surrealist identity, the SMG group could not completely detach themselves from the French school.

Evidence of this can be seen in what became known as the first surrealist manifesto in Japan, “A Note December 1927.” The note was composed by Kitasono and the Ueda Brothers and inserted separately into the third issue of the SMG magazine.

Published just several years after Breton's Manifesto, a translated version of the note was also sent to the (communist-surrealists) Louis Aragon, Paul Éluard, André Breton, as well as the (non-communist-surrealist) Antonin Artraud (Hirata 140).

A Note December 1927

A baptism was bestowed on us—we who have sung the praises to the progress of artistic desires and of senses in surrealism. We have mastered the technique of utilizing materials through the senses but without being limited by them. We construct a “Poetic Operation,” which depends on a certain dispensation, in a condition separated from the human realm. This particular condition makes us feel a sense of indifference not unlike that of technology. In our attempt to establish the limits of objectivity, we feel as if we were “Poetic Scientists.” We are neither melancholic nor happy. The human feeling that does not require the feeling subject to be human is suitably rigorous and sober. We sense an excitement appropriate to us as we construct our “Poetic Operation.” We will continue *Surréalisme*. We sing a hymn of praise to the virtue of saturation.

Kitasono Katue  
Uedo Toshi  
Uedo Tamotsu<sup>8</sup>

For the authors of the note, surrealism was a way to construct a “condition separated from the human realm” through a calculated use of the senses. Reworking the objectives of French surrealism, the Japanese poets explain here that they are seeking a path to a different domain, another experience of reality. One can also recognize the same appeal to experimentation and research that steered Breton and his peers, with terms such as “technology,” “objectivity,” “poetic scientists,” and “saturation.” The word “operation” used twice to refer to the surrealist pursuits can even be found in the manifestos of Breton (Sas 34). Not only do the themes of the note distantly echo many of those endorsed by the French surrealists, the fact that the note was sent to a number of

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<sup>8</sup> This particular translation appears in Hosea Hirata's *The Poetry and Poetics of Nishiwaki Junzaburō*, (as quoted in *Zen'eishi undōshi no kenkyū*. Tokyo: Shinsei sha).

French poets suggests a desire to establish a rapport with them. In this vein, the note can be viewed as a symbolic act of solidarity with the French surrealists.

Yet, at the same time, the note also asserts the independence of the Japanese surrealists and communicates their particular view of surrealism- one that is tempered emotionally, “neither melancholic nor happy.” Indeed, the Japanese surrealists do not outwardly express their support or veneration of the French surrealists, but rather are focused on proclaiming their own vision, emphasized by the decisive use of the subject “We.” As both Miryam Sas and John Solt have observed, the note reflects the contradictions that mark the beginnings of surrealism in Japan: oscillating between an association with the French poets and a declaration of creative independence from them.<sup>9</sup>

This duality can perhaps also be read in Nishiwaki’s commentary on Reverdy’s and Breton’s conception of the poetic image, which was based on the bringing together of two distant realities. In the section entitled “Profanus” of his *Surrealist Poetics*, Nishiwaki, citing both Reverdy and Breton, proposes that this technique is the key to all poetic processes: “In short, this idea of supernaturalist poetry has always been present in the works of great poets since antiquity and in fact is not particularly a new mode of poetry” (Hirata 9). In the eyes of Nishiwaki, the juxtaposition of two contradicting, disparate elements was not just distinct to the French avant-garde, but is rather rooted historically in all types of poetic expression (Hirata 9). Nishiwaki’s reinterpretation of the theory of the image exemplifies the way in which Japanese poets both expanded and challenged the ideas of the French surrealists.

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<sup>9</sup> For Sas’s discussion of the note, see pages 32-34 in *Faultlines*. For Solt’s analysis see pages 55-56 of *Shredding the Tapestry of Meaning*.

In addition to SMG, the coterie magazine *Shi to Shiron* profoundly shaped the development of surrealism in Japan. Founded in March 1928, the journal was made up of 11 members and featured Nishiwaki's academic essays, taking a primarily methodological and theoretical approach to poetry. In 1930, members of *Shi to Shiron* ceded from the group and formed their own magazine entitled *Shi\*genjitsu* (Poetry\*Reality). Critical of *Shi to Shiron's* formalist aestheticism, they sought a poetic experience more directly connected with reality, a commitment to the issues of daily life. Indeed, the debate fundamentally mirrors the one that separated the French surrealists after many of them decided to join the Communist party. Yet in comparison to the Parisian group, which was continually ruptured by political and ideological concerns, politics played less of a forceful role in Japanese surrealism (Linhartová 222).

As in France, literary surrealism eventually exploded into the visual domain, and indeed, artistic contributions remain the most enduring aspect of the Japanese movement.<sup>10</sup> Supported by the Parisian surrealists, Japan hosted the Second International Surrealist Exhibition in 1937, which travelled to Tokyo, Kyoto, and Osaka (see fig. 2). Founded in 1939, the Association of Artistic Culture (Bijutsu Bunka Kyokai) was another major effort to unite surrealist artists in Japan (Clark 19). However, the advent of WWII

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<sup>10</sup> This may perhaps be due to the fact that the transfer of images, unlike the transfer of text does not require the detour of translation. Images are thought to be able to be apprehended “directly” without having to go a filter of a translator.

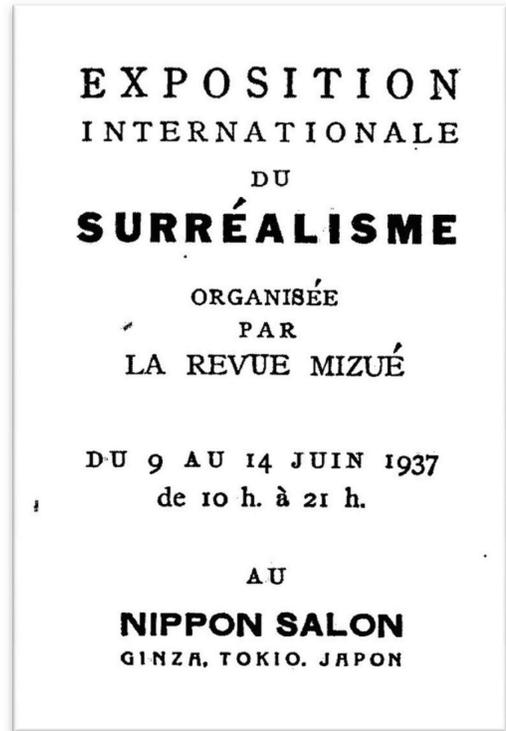
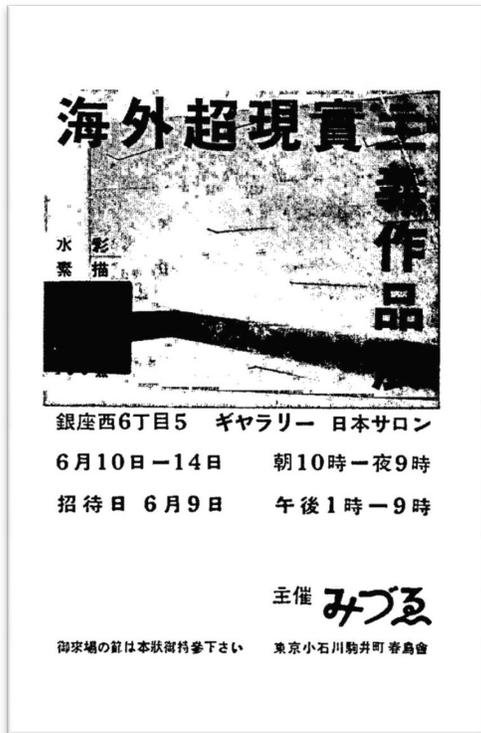


Fig. 2 Invitation cards (in French and Japanese) to the International Surrealist Exhibition in Tokyo, 1937; Věra Linhartová, *Dada et Surréalisme au Japon*, (Paris: Publications Orientalistes de France, 1987). Print. 152.

impeded further attempts at establishing a cohesive group. In 1941, Takiguchi and Ichirô Fukuzawa were arrested and jailed for approximately nine months because the militarist Japanese government was suspicious of their avant-garde activities, accusing them of sharing the communist and leftist tendencies of the French surrealists (Clark 19). After the war, surrealism continued to surface in the writing and art of the Japanese, but on a more individual level.

The history of Japanese surrealism is embedded in the close study and translation of the original French works. Although they continually cited the French poets, many the Japanese writers, especially those belonging to the SMG group desired a form of surrealism that they could essentially call their own. From the number of coterie

magazines and journals, however, one can see that Japanese surrealism was never a uniform group of text, but an amalgamation of ideas and theories that often opposed one another. The Japanese surrealists manifesto “A Note December 1927” embodies the ambiguous position of surrealism within Japan. Nevertheless, it is clear that surrealist thought found a strong base within this country. In the next section, I will situate surrealism within the greater context of modernity to explore why such was the case.

### **Japanese Surrealism Amidst Modernity**

As mentioned previously, French surrealism was a movement that spread internationally, but was taken up with particular ease and interest by the Japanese. In questioning the facility of this adoption, several scholars have pointed to certain aspects of traditional Japanese culture that seem to reflect French surrealism. They consider in what ways the Japanese conscious was already predisposed to surrealist thought or how its foundations already existed within Japanese society, only embodied in different forms. For instance, John Clark recognizes surrealists tendencies in certain practices and aesthetics long embedded in Japanese heritage including the collaborative writing of chain-poems (renga), associational and automatic strategies used in eighteenth century verse, and bizarre, incongruous imagery depicted in medieval narrative scrolls (13). Clark also proposes that because the Japanese have a long history of cultural assimilation, especially from China and Korea, they were primed to absorbing French surrealism (16).

While one could probably point out a number of correlations between French surrealism and Japan’s rich past, viewing surrealism with respect to Japan’s future, and

again evoking the words of Blanchot that began this chapter, is equally revealing.

Considering the wider changes taking place in Japanese society and literature at this time will allow us to recognize how surrealism fit into the modernist landscape of the 1920s and 1930s. Surrealism appealed to the already burgeoning spirit of transformation and the rejection of conservative tradition occurring in society. But at the same time it offered a completely new format for the Japanese in which to contemplate the changing world and the individual's place within it.

In his account of Japanese modernity and modernism *Advertising Tower*, William Gardner explores how the shifts in literature during the 1920s were inextricably linked to the modernization of society. This era witnessed an expansion of urban culture and technological innovation: advancements were made in such areas as media, communication, transportation, and architecture (Gardner 11). Although perhaps not the direct or sole cause, the Kanto Earthquake of 1923 certainly helped spur this sweeping reorganization of society. The immense and unsettling destruction in Tokyo and Yokohama caused by the natural disaster paved the way for a period of rapid rebuilding and renewal. In addition to these physical changes, Japan was also experiencing great political unrest, as the tensions between dissidents and the police state led to the arrests, and in some cases, the execution of many anarchists and socialists. The violence did not quell the revolutionary spirit among many Japanese, but instead fortified it (Hirata 131).<sup>11</sup> Japanese writers were not blind to the various forces eroding the prevailing way of life.

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<sup>11</sup> Although all of this activity occurred inside of Japan, it is important to note for understanding the importation of French surrealism, the country was by no means enclosed or isolated from the rest of the world. To the contrary, increased contact with other nations, especially from the West led to an active period of foreign borrowing and assimilation (Gardner).

As Gardner describes, they responded to the chaos of modernity through avant-garde literature:

Modernist and avant-garde literary and artistic movements were introduced and reconstituted in Japan as part of a wider series of debates on the nature of daily life in the context of the transformation of the urban environment, the development of communication technologies, and changes in social mores, as well as philosophical and political debates over such subjects as individualism and collective action. Modernism, in other words, was not perceived simply as a literary or artistic movement, but was integral to a larger discourse about the nature and orientation of Japanese modernity. (Gardner 52)

Thus, the pioneering messages of French surrealism corresponded to the greater atmosphere of reconfiguration and instability that was reshaping Japanese identity at the beginning of the twentieth century.

As is the case with any modernism, the trajectory of the Japanese avant-garde was founded on a resistance to the established literary circles. In the world of poetry, efforts were made in 1917 to unify authors and create a central body that would determine poetics standards and regulate publication, which became known officially as the *shidan*. Despite its own internal divisions, however, the *shidan* was considered to be a singular authoritative voice and disseminated its theories through the monthly journal called *Nihon shijin*.<sup>12</sup> The radical avant-garde writers of the 20s thus sought to challenge the conventions and homogenization of Japanese poetry fostered by the *shidan* through a remapping of stylistic and ideological poetic principles. Among the movements that emerged on the modern Japanese poetry scene in the 1920s, many of which began in

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<sup>12</sup> The *shidan*, although it was perceived as a unified institution, was split into two schools: the more emotionally, aesthetically focused *geijutsu-ha*, which was largely inspired by French Symbolism, and the more socially aligned *minshūshi-ha*, which aimed to make poetry available to the public through the use of informal, common language (Hirata).

Europe, were Futurism, Dada, Anarchist poetry, and Proletarian poetry. Thus, when French surrealism arrived in Japan, it encountered artists and intellectuals who shared an avant-garde sensibility. With its emphasis on freedom of lyrical prose and liberation of the mind from logical, linear thought, surrealism undermined the orthodoxy of the *shidan*. As Solt writes, “French surrealism appealed to Japanese youth as a complete cultural Other—a counterweight to the claustrophobic pressure of their own tradition” (Solt 64). The acceptance of surrealism thus reflected a latent yearning to be freed from a rigid artistic canon, in order to seek a more fluid, personal form of creative expression that was representative of the modern experience.

Although surrealism fit the avant-garde formula of rebelling against the established structure, it also offered a distinctive point of view from the other avant-garde movements circulating in Japan at this time. What was it that surrealism incorporated or addressed that was ignored by these other groups? While Dadaist and anarchist poetry were dominated by a sense of nihilism and raw emotion, on the other end of the spectrum, the proletarian poets were primarily concerned with radical political engagement that aimed to erase class differences. French surrealism offered if not a middle ground between these schools, at least an alternative third course. It was aesthetically oriented but also intellectual, and most appealingly, it transformed pessimist despair into optimistic hope (Nadeau 225).

French surrealism entered Japan at a time when the country was undergoing great societal and political change, powerful currents that carried over into art and literature through the emergence of the avant-garde. The revolutionary ideas of surrealism were thus very much in tune with the climate of transformation of the 1920s and 30s. Japanese

writers recognized the potential within surrealism to respond to the volatility of modernity, subvert the traditional literary establishment, and embark on a new artistic journey. However, not all were so receptive to surrealism's introduction into Japan. In the next chapter, I will discuss the criticisms of Japanese surrealism and investigate their relationship to questions of influence and narratives of Western cultural hegemony.

Following the histories of both French and Japanese surrealism enables us to see how the movement took on different meanings as it emerged in different cultural contexts. Developing through collective action, Bretonian surrealism was geared towards a rejection of bourgeois values in the aftermath of the First World War. Their avant-garde experimentation, formulated in their tracts and manifestos, aimed to generate excitement and encourage political engagement. In Japan, surrealism, as an imported movement, resonated with the major transformations taking place in society (such as the rise of industrialism) and the sense of instability that they fostered. Japanese authors, reinterpreting the ideas of the French in their own terms, undermined their own literary tradition. Although Japanese surrealism did not perhaps feature the same ideological coherency as the French movement, in both locations, surrealism crystallized out of a longing to shift how people chose to perceive themselves and the world around them.

## **CHAPTER 2: DECONSTRUCTING A SURREALIST EXCHANGE**

As much as surrealism flourished in Japan, Japanese contributions were generally overlooked or dismissed in accounts of the movement. Japan was omitted, for example, in the “Surrealist Map of the World, 1929” published in the magazine *Variétés* in Brussels. However, recent scholarship (interestingly, much of it done outside of Japan) has attempted to shed light on the merits of Japanese avant-garde.<sup>13</sup> These studies help reframe Japanese surrealism as more than imitative or derivative of its French counterpart, and also serve to expand the discourse on surrealism beyond the European “core.” As a result, we are reminded of the distinctively international, dispersive character of the surrealist movement.

Examining the transfer of surrealism from France to Japan thus brings to light a number of long-debated issues that hinge on the intersection of literature, modernity, and cultural exchange. In this chapter, I will look more closely at certain readings of Japanese surrealism, demonstrating how they operate within a Eurocentric interpretation of the avant-garde. I will also explore how these critiques are based on specific conceptions of literary influence that insist on linear models of influence, which locate sources and origins within texts. Invoking the theories of Harold Bloom, I will propose that Japanese surrealism be thought of in terms of a *creative misreading* of its French counterpart, in which translation and linguistic difference plays a large role. In its totality, this chapter will serve as enquiry into why the Japanese surrealist voice was marginalized and, hopefully contribute to recent efforts to reassess its involvement in the movement.

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<sup>13</sup> Many of the books I have cited in this study, such as William Gardner’s *Advertising Tower* and Hosea Hirata’s *The Poetry and Poetics of Nishiwaki Junzaburō*, are examples of such work.

## Critiques of Japanese Surrealism

Much of the criticism of Japanese surrealism was centered on the belief that the Japanese did not fully integrate the French principles into their work. While their poems had the appearance of surrealism, these critics (generally Japanese themselves) maintained that they did not actually contain genuine or original surrealist thought. Such accusations of imitation or illegitimacy against Japanese surrealists are not without historical precedent and political undertones. Since the Meiji Era, the Japanese have been attacked for their copying of all things Western, and for their dependency on European ideas.<sup>14</sup>

At the time of its introduction, Japanese surrealism was largely viewed as an aesthetic exercise that, although a stylistic novelty, lacked any internal substance or valuable meaning. Such is the view that the modernist writer Sakutarō Hagiwara was communicating when he denounced the work of the surrealists as “no more than Poster Literature in the end, a rhetoric exaggerated through cleverness” (as qtd in Sas 45). As Sas suggests, this reference to “Poster Literature” reflects the superficiality and almost commercial like character that was often associated with surrealism in Japan; it had a deceptive façade that could captivate attention with its unusualness, but was incapable of holding it. This attention to form and surface would have been deemed particularly contradictory to the freedom of thought propagated by Breton’s circle. If the Japanese surrealists were merely mechanically copying or imitating the French prose, they were submitting themselves to the same system of regulation that had stifled the creativity of

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<sup>14</sup> The Meiji period (1868-1912) marks the era in which Japan abandoned its feudalistic system in favor of a more modern state that included increased contact with foreign nations. This led to the assimilation of Western styles and attitudes into Japanese culture that was viewed as imitation by the West (Solt 65).

previous generations, a system that the French surrealists were aiming to completely eliminate.

Critics of the overly aesthetic orientation of Japanese surrealism found particular fault in the inclusion of French expressions, words, icons, and imagery into the Japanese poems. Not only was it considered to be a pretentious display of knowledge of European culture, they also saw it as tangible evidence that the Japanese poets were reproducing an art form as opposed to inventing one of their own (Sas 44). Representing an inversion of Western fascination with the “exotic” Orient, the work of the early Japanese avant-garde was seen as romanticizing and emulating French culture. While this point of view may be accurate, it does not consider the way in which France was appropriated by the Japanese imagination and used as a source of inspiration to explore new poetic frontiers, serving as a sort of spatial muse that broke with traditional poetic subjects and styles. Foreign references were instead reduced to simulation and seen as a betrayal of “true” Japanese identity.

Along side critiques of imitation, critics claim that the Japanese surrealists did not comprehend the theoretical concepts that were so essential to the philosophy of French surrealism. Contemporary scholar John Solt posits that the Japanese imported French surrealism without importing Freud’s theories on the unconscious that were so integral to their artistic practices. Because they did not have the same level of exposure to psychology, Solt maintains that Japanese understanding of surrealism was in many ways limited, or only cursory.<sup>15</sup> This argument assumes the necessity of a prior knowledge of

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<sup>15</sup> In *Shredding the Tapestry of Meaning*, Solt writes “The intellectual framework supporting Breton’s ideas (especially Freud’s theory of the unconscious) would have been hazy or new to the Japanese surrealists.

surrealism. But one must question whether surrealism necessitates a specific intellectual background or if it is rather an artistic mentality that can be universally accessed. Solt's argument seems somewhat hard to validate: to what extent the Japanese had been exposed to Freud's theories is hard to measure, and determining how much their prior knowledge base (or lack thereof) affected their understanding of French surrealism is perhaps even more difficult. However, Solt's view does point to the vast differences in cultures that interfered any pure or direct transplantation of surrealism from France to Japan. The Japanese inevitably had different points of reference, different experiences to draw from in their interpretations of surrealism, and therefore would never be able to replicate surrealism in the exact manner of the French.

Another common theme in the critiques of Japanese surrealists is their apparent disengagement with reality. Tai Kanbara, for example in his essay entitled "The Fall of Surrealism" which was published in *Shi to Shiron*, attacks the surrealists, specifically Junzaburō Nishiwaki, for what was perceived as his contempt and avoidance of reality.

What a reckless remark this is! We simply cannot allow any surrealists to say something so ridiculous. Not only does it show that Mr. Nishiwaki Junzaburō utterly lacks any awareness of reality that surrounds us now with an overwhelming power, any awareness of us contemporary people who must increasingly pay attention to reality, but also it covers up and beautifies the flight of those who lack sincerity, justice, power, and courage to face reality. (as qtd. in Hirata 144)

Here, Kanbara expresses a disgust that many felt towards Japanese Surrealism--it was irrelevant to real life, and withdrawn into a fantastical world of dreams. Surrealism seemed to abstain from the politically charged climate of Japan, remaining neutral among

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Therefore, even if they had surmounted the language barrier, they still would have encountered difficulties in puzzling out some of Breton's text" (53).

all the resistant and propagandist literatures of the time.<sup>16</sup> In contrast to the Parisian surrealists whose anti-bourgeois goals were intimately linked to their artistic practices, Japanese surrealist poetry lacked a strong political program, which was a grievous shortcoming in the eyes of certain critics.

One way the Japanese surrealists could exempt themselves from charges of imitation or weakness was through recognition from the French surrealists themselves. Forming a rapport, in person or by exchange of letters, with a French surrealist offered a type of legitimacy to the Japanese poet; it is likely that Takiguchi's relationship with Breton, for example, gave him a more respected standing among the surrealist circle in Japan. William Gardner observes how modern Japanese literature was subject to validation within both the domestic and European spheres:

There has to be a double endorsement, first by the Western critical establishment and then a rubber-stamping by the corresponding Japanese establishment. You could say that the Japanese artists were free to produce whatever they felt like, and that is true, but in the act of canonization the Japanese avant-garde critical establishment has never wavered in seeing Japanese versions of surrealism and subsequent movements of foreign origin as necessitating Western approval. An artist could obtain this approval either by having lived abroad or by having received the endorsement of a famous foreign artist.<sup>17</sup>

Gardner's comments reveal the symbolic authority the West held over Japanese avant-garde establishment, as well as the difficulties that Japanese poets faced in having their work recognized.

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<sup>16</sup> Beginning in the 1930s, patriotic poetry was used by the Japanese government to garner national support for Japan's involvement in WWII. At the same time, poetry that was judged anti-war or resistant to government decisions was persecuted.

Critics vary in what they identify as “defective” in Japanese surrealism: a copying of form, a blind insertion of French words, an incomplete understanding of the surrealists philosophy, etc. They are all underwritten by an assumption that a “correct” or “original” poetic surrealism belongs to the French. Within this construction, Breton and his peers are positioned as the authorial masters, and their poems serve as the standard by which to judge surrealist poetry produced elsewhere, including Japan.

### **Outposts of the Avant-Garde**

In thinking about the reception of Japanese surrealism, it is useful to consider how the avant-garde in general is communicated and recognized on an international level. As many scholars have pointed out, the term “avant-garde” has principally been associated with a Western point of view, applied to cultural and artistic forms in Europe or America.<sup>18</sup> As a consequence, non-Western movements are considered only to be outposts of the avant-garde and are identified only through their resemblance to the European base. This is to say that Japanese surrealism is designated as such because of what it has in common with French surrealism, not in relation to its inner dynamics. However, imposing or projecting principles of the European avant-garde into a different culture, such as Japan, is problematic. Reinforcing Western cultural hegemony, it leads to

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<sup>18</sup> For example, the dominance of the West in discourse on the avant-garde is the subject of Sascha Bru’s book *Europa! Europa?: the avant-garde, modernism, and the fate of a continent* (Berlin, 2009).

what Edward Said described as an “orientalization” of Eastern culture.<sup>19</sup> In addition, it produces ambiguities and contradictions in what is identified as “avant-garde.”

In an essay entitled “The Impossible Avant-Garde in Japan,” Inaga Shigemi argues that Japanese art cannot be labeled “avant-garde.” Inaga maintains that the notion of avant-garde is specific to Europe, signifying a revolt against the prevailing literary and aesthetic traditions of the West through the appropriation of the Other, a non-Western cultural element. This definition therefore disqualifies the existence of an avant-garde in a non-Western culture; as such an appropriation would actually mean a return to its own tradition. Inaga explains the limitations this particular understanding of the avant-garde forces on the Third World:

That which is considered traditional in a non-Western context become avant-garde as it is integrated into a Western context. But this transplantation is a one-way dispossession. For a non-Western culture, this represents a double alienation: non-Western culture provides the Western avant-garde with an alibi but, in doing so, the non-Western avant-garde is uprooted, and is capable of basing itself upon its own culture only through reference to the Western avant-garde. (Inaga 69)

In Inaga’s view, the Western connotation of avant-garde pigeonholes creative production in Japan, as well as the rest of the non-Western world, into one of two categories: simulation of the West or adherence to its own tradition. In this way, they are refused the right to their own veritable avant-garde; there is no possibility of an anti-tradition avant-garde, as there is in the West.

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<sup>19</sup> This does not imply that non-Western avant-garde should be isolated from the West. As John Clark points out, “It would also be flawed to think one could approach whatever might be an avant-garde in any Asian context without using knowledge from the debates and analyses that had constituted avant-garde thought and practice in Euramerica” (Clark 217).

Inaga points to another contradiction resulting from the ambivalent position of the avant-garde in Japan. When Japanese artists travelled to Europe, they had to embrace their “Japanicity” in order to be recognized. However, while in Japan, they would distance themselves from such nationalism and instead identify with European culture. As Inaga notes “the artists, Janus-like, could exploit this antinomy by presenting him- or herself to the Japanese as a Parisian artist, while in Paris exhibiting him- or herself as an incarnation of Japanese aesthetics” (Inaga 71). Not without an element of deception, this dual identity (what Inaga refers to as “cultural betrayal”) is another manifestation of the “double endorsement” that Gardner described as necessary for canonization into the Japanese avant-garde. Japanese artists had to adopt opposing identities in order for their work to be considered original in both Japan and France.

Responding to Inaga’s essay, Steven C. Ridgely offers an alternative, more generalized conception of the avant-garde. Ridgely is also conscious of the way in which a Eurocentric avant-garde ignores revolutionary art produced elsewhere: “To cede aesthetic inversion and injections of foreign culture to a small group of French men is to efface similar antiestablishment projects going on around the world at the same time” (Ridgely 140). Thus, he proposes that we strip the term “avant-garde” of any geographical or temporal particularities. Acquiring a new composition with each environment it enters, the avant-garde will be shaped by cultural difference as it confronts the dominant aesthetic scales (Ridgely 140). In comparison to the definition analyzed by Inaga, this vision of the avant-garde emphasizes artistic innovation and renewal of tradition over adoption of foreign styles or techniques. In doing so, it expands the range

of what can be considered “avant-garde” and makes *possible* its existence in the Third World.

Inaga’s essay reveals how the critiques of Japanese surrealism do not necessarily represent objective viewpoints, but are rather bound to a Eurocentric definition of the avant-garde. The perception of France as the headquarters of the avant-garde contributed to an inevitable evaluation of Japanese surrealism as imitation. Ridgley’s reconceptualization of the avant-garde allows surrealism in Japan to be understood on its own grounds. This is not to deny the European influence, but merely to shift focus to the ways in which adoption of Western art or literary style in Japan was used as resistance against *Japanese* institutions.

### **Creative Misreading**

In addition to evoking the relationship between East and West, the issue of influence that marks the encounter between French and Japanese surrealism can also be framed through a textual lens. As we have seen, Japanese surrealist poetry was generally read in light of its allusions to and divergences from French surrealism. These interpretations ascribe a certain primacy to the French texts, and search for their abiding presence within the Japanese works. Such method of analysis, however, is founded in a linear model of poetic production in which the work of one group of authors clearly and consciously stems from the work of another. While providing a stable construction of author and text, such a hierarchal order does not necessarily account for the intricacies

behind literary influence. In particular, it tends to overlook the myriad of forces shaping the work, as well as the autonomy the work has in its own formulation.

Harold Bloom's theories of intertextuality are useful in rethinking the relationship between the poems of the Japanese and French surrealists (that is, the relationship between a poet and his predecessor). In *A Map of Misreading*, Bloom argues that a "strong poet" will refashion the texts of his literary father in accordance with his individual poetic psyche. "To live the poet must *misinterpret* the father, by the crucial act of misprision, which is the rewriting of the father" (Bloom 19). Overcoming paternal anxiety, the poet deliberately misreads the work of his predecessor and engages in a process of creative revision. This misreading draws on his idiosyncratic point of view, and only implicitly or unconsciously references the previous text. As a result, every poem is essentially a response or reaction to another poem or multiple poems. Bloom's theories challenge methods of traditional literary criticism, which are founded in "source-study" and attempt to locate origin and end points among texts. The foundations of literary production, in Bloom's view, are largely ambivalent, involving a network of authors all exerting influence on one another in multi-faceted and often immeasurable ways.

Bloom's paradigms of misprision and misreading offer a more nuanced understanding of the French influence on Japanese surrealism. According to his vision, the Japanese surrealists were intentionally misinterpreting their French "fathers," adapting their texts to meet their own particular aesthetic needs. This misinterpretation should not be confused with a false reproduction or mimesis, for it is a personal and inevitably fragmented assimilation of ideas textured by a particular local situation. It is also essential to point out that, through this concept of misprision, the French surrealists

are themselves the sons of their poetic ancestors, which extend far beyond Dada. There is therefore no traceable, fundamental surrealist identity but instead continual misreading and rewriting at different periods of time and across different cultural contexts. In recognizing such fluidity, France can no longer be considered the ultimate origin or source of surrealism and Japan must be viewed as more than its filial outgrowth. Surrealism thus remains variable, eluding definition, as well as possession by any one author or group of authors.

This multi-cultural polymorphous understanding of the movement is reinforced by the words of the French surrealist Antonin Artaud. In an open letter to Tibet's spiritual leader, the Dali Lama published in the April 1925 issue of *La Révolution surréaliste*, Artaud writes:

Send us your illumination, in a language which our contaminated European minds can understand...No one source or system reigns supreme, for all interpenetrate in a dynamic but disjunctive world where identity is obscured and laid bare in the face of perpetual change, where form is discontinuous and uncertain, where meaning is repeatedly violated and obstructed. In this world evolution proceeds by explosive, unexpected cross-connections and not by linear progression.” (as qtd in Stich 12)

The letter offers evidence that the French surrealists looked towards Eastern philosophy for inspiration, again challenging a unidirectional conception of influence. The French were not only impacting the East through the spread of surrealism, but were also impacted *by* the East in its creation.<sup>20</sup> Artaud's use of the word “contaminated” likewise inverts the conception of the West as pure and enlightened, and reveals that the French

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<sup>20</sup> It is important to recognize that France has a long history of cultural borrowing from the East, stemming back to its interactions with the Orient during the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Japonisme, the influence of Japanese wood-block prints on impressionist painters in France, is an example of this.

surrealists did not necessarily view themselves as cultural or literary superiors. To the contrary, Nadeau explains that the “The Orient was not only the land of the sages, but also for the surrealists the reservoir of untapped forces...” as the East seemed to have already transcend the problems of pettiness that plagued the West (Nadeau 107).

Artaud’s vision of “a dynamic but disjunctive world” provides an apt metaphor for describing the environment in which literary exchange occurs: poetic ideas are transplanted from one location to another, from one page to another, but they are inevitably modified, altered, and redefined in the process. Recalling the theories of Bloom, Artaud draws our attention to the lack of a supreme source, continual change of form, ambiguous identity, and undecipherable meaning that all result from this activity. “Unexpected cross-connections” as opposed to “linear progression” characterize the relations (or non-relations) that the texts form with one another, which eventually give rise to poetic innovation. Indeed, these are the very principles in which surrealist poetry is rooted: spontaneous and illogical associations made by the mind, shared and reinterpreted by others through words.

Artaud’s reflections, like those of Bloom, broaden the potential ways that texts engender one another, and can inform a more comprehensive understanding of the intersection of French and Japanese surrealism, and the international nature of the surrealist movement in general. While the poems of the Japanese surrealists have cited their French predecessors, they have, returning to the terminology of Bloom, misread them in their own creative implementation. The continuity of the surrealist poetry from France to Japan, and beyond is thus paradoxically based on constant reinvention and change.

## Surrealism in Translation

In thinking about the notions of misinterpretation or misreading, one recalls the pivotal role that translation played in the Japanese adoption of surrealism. As explained in the previous chapter, the majority of Japanese did not read the original works of the French surrealists, but rather their works in translation. The surrealist poems were thus filtered by the mind of the Japanese translator, subject to his own interference, an intervention necessitated by two deeply incompatible languages. Indeed, the process of translation raises a number of questions: does surrealism resist, or to the contrary, is it conducive to expression in a foreign language? How were the Japanese reinterpreting French surrealist poetry in the act of translating it? In what way did their revisions change the experience of the reader, as well as depart from conventions in Japanese language and literature?

Translators of French surrealism in Japan, foremost among them, Shuzo Takiguchi and Junzaburō Nishiwaki, faced a difficult task on many levels. Their undertaking was not just a matter of translating foreign texts, but a complex body of poetry and theory that sought to revolutionize the human relationship to language.<sup>21</sup> Attempting to reformulate the way the mind organizes ideas and constructs reality, the French surrealists experimented with syntax and broke grammatical rules. The poems of Robert Desnos, for example, are known for their reliance on word play, as well as their construction and exploitation of ambiguity. Indeed, it was poetic practices like these that

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<sup>21</sup> The French surrealists wanted to redefine the very function of the word as symbol, restoring its independence and power as well as expanding its versatility as an instrument of communication. As Breton wrote in the *Introduction to the Discourse on the Paucity of Reality* ("Introduction au discours sur le peu de réalité") (1924): "Are not our powers of speech essentially responsible for the mediocrity of our universe? Language can and must be set free from its bondage" (141).

led to the aphorism “surrealism is writing negated.” Japanese translators thus somehow had to replicate this unorthodox treatment of words into a language based on a drastically different alphabet and grammatical system. The infinite complexity involved in translating surrealist poetry is reported by Takiguchi in his response to a survey (conducted years later in 1973) concerning the future of surrealism. Writing in French, he states:

...I regret the fact that there is a very specific difficulty in language, in particular in the difference between those of the Orient and those of the Occident, and that difference in itself is not the principle problem—or rather, there is something essential in the future of Surrealist thought. The urgent necessity, but I do not conceal the difficulty of realizing it [Surrealist thought] through discussion in a “manifest” and generalized language. What Liberty and community I believe in! (As qtd. in Sas 119)

Recognizing the huge linguistic gap between “the Orient” and “the Occident,” Takiguchi yearns for a universal language that would facilitate the exchange of surrealist thought, a language that would transcend cultural and geographical disparities and unite its speakers through pure, direct communication. Because no such surrealist tongue ever came into existence, however, the translators were forced to mediate the abstraction of French surrealism with the relative precision of traditional Japanese language. As many scholars of Japanese modernism have observed, this involved a process of rewriting that for the Japanese pushed linguistic limits and expanded the possibilities of poetic expression.

Not only would the Japanese translators have encountered vocabulary and grammatical patterns in French that had no Japanese equivalent, they would have also confronted concepts that did not share the same connotations in their native language. Each translator had their individual approach to reconciling these discrepancies, but they

all consisted in some form of deconstructing traditional Japanese language and literary tradition. For instance, as Sas observes, Takiguchi's style of translation was marked by a re-explication and renewal of Japanese terms. In his transcriptions of Breton's work, he often takes on the role of commentator in an effort to detach fundamental surrealist concepts such, as "real" "dream" and "reality," from their customary associations within Japanese culture.<sup>22</sup> Nishiwaki was more eccentric in his techniques. In both his translations and his original poetry, he combined the Japanese and French tongue in a manner that defamiliarized the conventions of both languages and constituted a completely new "translatory language."<sup>23</sup> Katue Kitasono, who translated the poems of Paul Éluard and Stéphane Mallarmé, relied heavily on literal translation, which meant that his work often contained grammatical errors and awkward phrasing. Although he was often accused of mistranslation, Kitasono's methods were intended to represent surrealist imagery as purely as possible. According to Kitasono, yielding to the Japanese linguistic structure would have compromised the innovation and suppressed the poetic energy of the original French texts.<sup>24</sup> What is important to recognize is that all three translators had to break established Japanese linguistic patterns in order to transpose French surrealism. While this can perhaps be viewed as evidence of the movement's resistance to foreign languages, it can also be seen as the very quality that makes literary surrealism universal, translatable, adaptable. No matter what the language is, surrealism disrupts the linguistic status quo in an effort to reinvigorate words and ameliorate usage of them.

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<sup>22</sup> See Sas pages 103-108 for an in-depth comparison of Breton's original texts with Takiguchi's translations.

<sup>23</sup> See Hirata 183-202 for a consideration of Nishiwaki's first collection of poetry *Ambarvalia* in which he experimented with a very unusual style of literal translation.

<sup>24</sup> See John Solt 107-109 for a comprehensive explanation of Kitasono's translations.

This is not to say that meaning went unchanged from the conversion of surrealism from French into Japanese: quite the contrary. But rather than attempting to identify differences in signification or implication, a task that is beyond my own linguistic capabilities as I do not speak Japanese, I will instead consider them in relation to our understanding of Japanese surrealism as a whole. The French sociologist Robert Escarpit's reference to translation as "trahison créatrice" or "creative treason" points to the inherent betrayal or deformation of meaning that occurs through a shift of languages, but it also suggests the potentiality for new expression therein (364). This notion of "creative treason" can be applied to the Japanese renderings of French surrealism. In rearranging their content and structure, the Japanese translators were inevitably treasonous, unfaithful to the French poems, but at the same time they were engaging in an artistic exercise that would contribute to a surrealism that was uniquely Japanese. The crucial reinterpretation, misreading that inevitably occurs in the act of translation thus cultivated new formulations of surrealist concepts. In turn, these rewritings contributed to the development of a surrealism distinct from the French.

The consequences of the translations on Japanese language and literary style must also be emphasized here. In translating the French works, the Japanese were participating in a break down and unloosening of the standards of their own language. The translations of French surrealism, as those of other Western avant-garde texts, abandoned the elegant literary language in favor of a more colloquial vernacular. Likewise, instead of following the traditional forms of *waka* and haiku, the translated poems appeared in free verse. These shifts, marking a dissonance in Japanese literature,

signal the onset of modernism in Japan.<sup>25</sup> Perhaps Escarpit's theory of "creative treason" can, in this case, be extended to incorporate a betrayal of the language into which the text is being translated. In addition to a disloyalty of the original text, translation, here, is also unfaithful to the "target" language, bending its rules and broadening its vocabulary. Takiguchi, Nishiwaki, and Kitasono, among others translators did not cede to the conventions of their own language but instead, subverted them. The injury, however, gave way to freer constructions within the language as a whole. These translations of French surrealism thus contributed to the greater transformation of the Japanese language and literary style.

It is important to recognize that the linguistic obstacles that inhibited a direct or "untainted" transference of surrealism, also allowed for cultural variations of the movement. Translation was pivotal to the growth of Japanese surrealism, as it stands independently of French surrealism. And we therefore must consider the translators not only in their role as correspondents to the Parisian group, but also in their role as creators of the movement and rebels of traditional Japanese language. They were introducing not only new ways of thinking, but new ways to communicate that thinking, as well. The convergence of French and Japanese, as incited by surrealism indeed calls forth the most enigmatic properties of language.

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<sup>25</sup> In his book *The Poetry and Poetics of Nishiwaki Junzaburō*, Hosea Hirata locates the beginning of Japanese modernism with the translation of Western poetry, which he compares to "a violation of the mother tongue," the invasion of classical Japanese by foreign languages.<sup>25</sup> Such a linguistic assault, Hirata argues, incited the production of the original work of Japanese poets, constituting modernist body of literature in Japan.

As I have attempted to demonstrate in this chapter, the encounter of French and Japanese surrealism involves interactions on many levels: between the avant-garde of the East and West, between a literary text and its predecessor, and between one language and another. Rather than imposing a hierarchy on these relationships, one can perhaps achieve a deeper understanding of the movements, as they exist individually and together, by placing them on a horizontal plane. The Japanese encounter with French surrealism cannot be accurately described as imitation but rather as interpretation and reformulation.

**CHAPTER 3: FRENCH SURREALISM IN MODERN JAPANESE LITERATURE  
AND BEYOND**

The first two chapters of this thesis engage with the history and theory surrounding the transfer of surrealism from France to Japan. Taking a more thematic approach, this chapter will attempt to identify the various ways modern Japanese authors have interpreted French surrealism through literature, and furthermore how these surrealist elements function in their texts. I will begin by looking at the short story “House of the Sleeping Beauties” written in 1960 by Yasunari Kawabata, the first Japanese Nobel laureate for literature, and will also consider the novel *Hard-boiled Wonderland and the End of the World* by the critically acclaimed and internationally successful Haruki Murakami. Recalling fundamental motifs in French surrealist poetics, “House of the Sleeping Beauties” and *Hard-Boiled Wonderland and the End of the World* feature an alternative portrayal of desire and human sexuality, an interest in the unconscious or dream world, and a scheme of ambiguity and fragmentation. Yet unlike the majority of work produced by Breton’s circle, these works are narratives as opposed to verse, and are not necessarily attached to a greater collective project or ideological vision.

Murakami and Kawabata both penetrate the surface of reality and craft bizarre worlds that mystify but also fascinate the reader in their unfamiliarity. They evoke the surreal in order to depict changing individuals in changing environments as they confront their own alienation and loneliness. However, it is important to note that these works are not singularly “surrealist.” Transcending literary genres, they blend surrealist ideas and techniques with those of magical realism, fantasy, and science fiction. Thus we are again confronted with those ever-elusive questions of how one defines surrealism and what

makes a work “surrealist.” Pertinent to our discussion here is also the question of what defines *Japanese* surrealism, and how it differs from the surrealist perspectives that originated in France.

### **“House of the Sleeping Beauties”**

Yasanawa Kawabata’s short story “House of the Sleeping Beauties” provides a rich text through which to think about how French surrealism emerges and operates in Japanese literature. “House of the Sleeping Beauties” tracks the visits of an aging man named Eguchi, to a house where old men can pay to spend the night beside a beautiful sleeping girl. Forbidden to engage in sexual acts with his naked partners, as per the house rules, Eguchi is content to bask in their sensuous youth until the morning, at which time he must leave before the girls awaken. Surrealist elements are integral to Kawabata’s meditation on growing older and the profound isolation that it so often entails. He probes Eguchi’s unconscious, illustrating his erotic desires, memories, and dreams and all of their paradoxal uncertainties. Indeed, all of these elements--sexuality, the unconscious, and ambiguity—work dynamically with one another, channeling surrealism, and communicating the difficulties of reaching the end of life.

Influenced by Freud’s theories of sexuality, the French surrealists were deeply interested in desire and its relation to the human psyche. Breton emphasized that the erotic should be viewed as an “aspect of the inner experience, as opposed to animal sexuality” (as qtd. in *Le Surréalisme et la Peinture*, 377). Such an attitude towards desire is also visible in “House of the Sleeping Beauties.” Kawabata portrays Eguchi’s eroticism

as a manifestation of his psychological needs, as a force that is embedded in the undercurrents of his mind. On several occasions he compares the breasts of the sleeping beauties with the breast of his mother, a strong indication of his own Oedipal complex. So close to death, Eguchi yearns for the comfort and affection of the one who gave him life. “The thought flashed across his mind: the first woman in his life had been his mother... Now at sixty-seven as he lay between two naked girls, a new truth came from deep inside him. Was it blasphemy, was it yearning?” (Kawabata 94). Kawabata insinuates that his apparent obsession with the sleeping beauties is perhaps veiling an incestuous desire for his mother. In other words, the young girls serve as a maternal substitute for Eguchi’s absent mother. In the final scene of the novel, nestled in between the two sleeping beauties, clutching on to their breasts, Eguchi searches for the security of his mother’s womb, a total unity with her body. Resonating with French surrealism, the eroticism in “House of the Sleeping Beauties” is vaguely suggestive of Eguchi’s latent impulses and emotional deficiencies.

Much surrealist literature and art is guided by Breton’s notion of the “*érotique-voilée*” (erotic-veiled), which locates beauty within representations of sexuality that are somehow concealed or obscured, but still provoke excitement or curiosity. As an application of this idea, dislocated female body parts often serve as multifaceted symbols of eroticism, beauty, and death.<sup>26</sup> Kawabata employs a similar treatment of desire in “House of the Sleeping Beauties.” “Still able to function as a man,” Eguchi experiences a strong sexual attraction to the women he lies next to, an attraction that is fetishistic in

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<sup>26</sup> For example, in his poem *L’union libre* (1931), Breton paints his desire for his beloved by considering individually the parts of her body- hair, waist, eyes, etc. This obsessive attention to the female body carries over into the visual realm of surrealism, as well. Exuding eroticism, many of the Magritte’s images feature sections or fragments of body parts. Kawabata’s representation of the sleeping beauties in many ways, abides by this surrealist tradition.

nature. He looks intently at the sleeping girls from different angles and poses their limbs in such a way that they serve as his “living doll” (Kawabata 20). Eguchi’s objectifying gaze deconstructs the female body as it zooms in on its individual parts:

Her right hand and wrist were at the edge of the quilt. Her left arm seemed to stretch diagonally under the quilt. Her right thumb was half hidden under her cheek. The fingers on the pillow beside her face were slightly curved in the softness of sleep, though not enough to erase the delicate hollows where they joined the hand. The warm redness was gradually richer from the palm to the fingertips. It was a smooth, glowing white hand (Kawabata 18).

Here, the nuances in the positioning and shape of the girl’s hands, wrists, arms, fingers, etc. are described with a palpable sensuality. The consequence of this, as Yukio Mishima writes in the story’s introduction, is that “the sleeping beauties themselves are fragments of human beings, urging lust to its highest intensity” (Kawabata 9). Yet, this lust cannot be written off as pure sexual longing, as it is also sensitive to beauty. It is clear that Eguchi cherishes the body parts as he removes them from their totality: “Her breasts seemed to be beautifully rounded... Was it not the glory of the human race to have made woman’s breasts so beautiful?” (Kawabata 27). Exemplifying the “erotique-voilée,” Eguchi’s fixation on the corporal details of the young girls can thus also be interpreted as a celebration, a glorification of the many delights of beauty. The mental dismembering of the sleeping beauties, while overtly erotic, also points to an appreciation of beauty, which for Eguchi, is heightened in the ugliness of old age. In this way, Kawabata inscribes the opposing faces of desire within surrealist thought: carnal impulse and sublime exaltation.

It is essential to point out that the kind of desire illustrated in “House of the Sleeping Beauties” is a forbidden one. Setting a tone of interdiction, the story begins with the decreeing of the house rules: “He was not to do anything in bad taste, the woman of

the inn warned old Eguchi. He was not to put his finger into the mouth of the sleeping girl, or try anything else of that sort” (Kawabata 13). Eguchi’s eroticism is constrained not only by these stipulations, repeated throughout the story, but also by his own “fatherly” thoughts. Imagining his daughters in the place of the virgin sleeping beauties, he is “assailed by feelings of shame and degradation” (Kawabata 52). It is clear that such sentiments stem from Eguchi’s own moral compass, which insists that the operations of the house are ethically wrong: “Lying beside a girl who had been put to sleep was doubtless evil” (Kawabata 22). The prohibitions set by the caretaker are thus compounded by the forbidding voice of his own conscience. Both represent the kind of socially constructed restraints and responsibilities that the founding surrealists were aiming to remove in order to unbind libidinal energy. It is because these forces are repressing Eguchi’s yearnings that his desire remains unrealized and unabated. Paradoxically, these limitations also allow his desire to remain desire, to endure. Without any restriction or sense of risk, his sexual craving would be easily satisfied and subsequently, cease to exist. Thus, a shade of the taboo is essential to the gripping depiction of eroticism in the story.

Against this oppressive atmosphere of interdiction, Eguchi often flirts with the possibility of violating the rules and committing sexually deviant acts with the sleeping beauties. These urges align with the notion of erotic transgression that was crucial to both Breton and Georges Bataille. Like these authors, Kawabata explores the possibility of overstepping and breaching sexual codes and the conflict that such perversion entails: “The impulse toward a misdeed more exciting than putting his finger to her tongue flashed through him... It would be easy to strangle her, or to cover up her nose and

mouth” (Kawabata 66). Later in the novel, the disorienting, sexually-charged impulse to kill returns: “He felt a sudden urging of the blood: he wanted to use force on her, break the rule of the house, destroy the ugly nostrum, and so take his leave” (Kawabata 89). In these fleeting moments, Eguchi crosses over from the regulated order of the house to the irrational yet liberated dimension of the unconscious, seeming to lose himself in the process. Oscillating between desire and danger, eroticism and violence, these moments of transgression create a tension found in much French surrealist work that implicates the relationship between sexuality and the death instinct. Bataille arrives at the very core of this issue when he asks in the introduction to *Eroticism*: “What does physical eroticism signify if not a violation of the very being of its practitioners? — a violation bordering on death, bordering on murder?” (17). Eguchi’s disturbing sexual fantasies seem to corroborate with Bataille’s postulations, and in doing so represent the ambivalence that underlies eroticism and its link to death.

In addition to desire, dreams were an obsession of the early French surrealists and played an essential role in their poetic activity. Breton’s *Claire de terre* opens up with five accounts of dreams that resemble verse, and nearly all of Paul Éluard’s poems in *Mourir de pas mourir* evoke states of reverie. Sleeping states were likewise a frequent subject in many of Robert Desnos’s poems. In effect, dreams generated text for the French surrealists. Using the technique of automatic writing, they immediately recorded the “uncontrolled succession of images” of their dreams, producing imaginative, flowing discourses. The formlessness of poetry allowed them to communicate freely and immediately the fantasies that their unconscious dictated.

Dreams, taking on symbolic significance, also inspire Kawabata's narrative in "House of the Sleeping Beauties." In portraying Eguchi's reveries, Kawabata abandons sequential action and instead lingers on the nonlinear internal narrative taking place in Eguchi's mind. In the surrealist vein of automatism or free association, one image or sensation provokes the emergence of another. Although they themselves are in an insensible stupor, drugged into a "sleep like death," the physical presence of the sleeping beauties serves as a catalyst for Eguchi's reminiscences (Kawabata 59). For example, the scent of milk on one of the girls evokes thoughts of nursing babies, pregnancy, and a tumultuous relationship he had with a geisha many years ago. Likewise, another odor recalls blooming Camellia flowers, which in turn incites memories of his three married daughters:

Far back in the eyes on which the girl's hand rested, he let the images of flowers come up and fade away, fade away and come up; and feelings returned of the days when, his daughters married, he had been drawn to other young girls. (Kawabata 48)

This passage illustrates the delicacy, the subtlety of movements of Eguchi's mind as it wanders without restraint between past and present. Conjured by the presence of the sleeping beauty, the images of flowers indicate the detachment he feels from his daughters and the void their marriage has left within him.

Kawabata's use of dream symbolism is also at play in Eguchi's surreal nightmares. In the first unpleasant dream, he is embraced by a woman with four legs and in the next, one of his daughters has just given birth to a disfigured child, which is immediately chopped into pieces and thrown away. In yet another nightmare, he has returned from his honeymoon to find red dahlias engorging his house, and his dead

mother standing outside. Disturbing and strange, these dreams seem to further allude to Eguchi's complicated relationship to women and sexuality. The presence of his daughter, his mother, the red flowers (a recurring image in the short story) are all clearly emblematic, however the precise meaning behind these symbols is largely indeterminate. Dreams thus symbolically convey Eguchi's feeling about events in his past, and in doing so, depict the link between the subconscious and written expression that the French surrealists explored in their poetry.

In addition to desire and dreams, ambiguity is another major characteristic of French surrealist poetics. The use of language, often disregarding grammatical patterns or omitting clarifying references, creates a sense of confusion and suggests changing, fragmented visions.

Ambiguity pervades "House of the Sleeping Beauties" in a very similar way. As the physical environment is absorbed into Eguchi's mind, the reader has difficulty discerning what is real and what is illusion. The haziness is made thicker by the fact that fundamental details of the narrative and of the character's background are omitted. The reader is only given *hints* as to how the house came to exist in the first place, for example, or what Eguchi's first marriage was like. Questions, without definitive answers punctuate the text, giving voice to the protagonist's own incomprehension, as well as reflecting the uncertainty of the reader. For instance, while Eguchi is lying next to the one of the beauties, he hears her speaking in her sleep: "She had been dreaming. Was the dream over now? Perhaps it had not been a dream. Perhaps the heavy touch of old men had trained her to talk in her sleep, to resist. Was that it?" (Kawabata 47). Simple language masks complex meanings: in these lines, a statement is made, then immediately

doubted, and other possible explanations are considered. The matter is left unresolved—we do not know whether the girl was dreaming, nor do we know the significance of what she was saying. As other critics have observed, the confusion underlying Kawabata’s language is even greater in Japanese because of the lack of subjects in the sentences.<sup>27</sup> Through his stylistic and narrative choices, Kawabata creates a deeply ambiguous reality that is ultimately open to interpretation. Such ambiguity embodies a surrealist vision of the world, in which partial or fragmented understanding is privileged.

As much as Kawabata’s work aligns with the original theories and practices of the early French surrealists, it also harkens back to themes often associated with the Japanese people. Sensitivity to old age and to nature, displayed by Eguchi for example, recall traditional Japanese values. Likewise Kawabata’s meditative style evokes the traditional form of haiku:

The roar of the waves against the cliff softened while rising. Its echo seemed to come up from the ocean as music sounding in the girl’s body, the beating in her breast, and the pulse at her wrist added to it. In time with the music, a pure white butterfly danced past his closed eyelids. (Kawabata 28)

Putting particular emphasis on the auditory, the sound of the ocean is fused with the rhythm of the sleeping girl’s pulse, which then also regulates the fluttering of the imaginary “pure white” butterfly.<sup>28</sup> This string of images exhibits a dreamlike fluidity between the natural and human world: a delicate harmony connects the ocean, the girl, the butterfly, and Eguchi. At the same time, Kawabata also blends the exterior reality

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<sup>27</sup> For instance, Cécil Sakai in her study entitled *Kawabata, le clair-obscur* discusses the ambiguity in Kawabata’s prose, which is intensified in the Japanese language.

<sup>28</sup> The whiteness of the butterfly is further connected to the cap of a baby of another woman from Eguchi’s past. He subsequently remembers his trip to Kyoto with that woman, and their encounter in which she told him the baby was not his. One can see here Kawabata’s technique of using one image as a springboard into multiple events in Eguchi’s memory.

with interior imagination, creating another union that is decisively surrealist. The passage illustrates the unique way in which Kawabata weaves the dreaminess of surrealism with an awareness of nature that is characteristic of Japanese culture. Kawabata is very much attuned to the intricate way in which the mind makes seemingly unrelated connections, and blends his own cultural background into these mental associations.

Perhaps the most critical difference between Kawabata's surrealism and the surrealism of the French poets is the absence of any sense of freedom in the former. Surrealism in France was originally conceived as a call for *liberation*, as a means to break down both the barriers of the mind and repressive social structures. Art and the imagination, according to those in Breton's circle, were tools to break away from the existing order and seek out new ways of thinking. Contrary to this quest for revolution, however, an atmosphere of claustrophobia and paralysis dominates "House of the Sleeping Beauties." Eguchi seems to be powerless before his desires. The feeling of imprisonment and helplessness is accentuated by the fact that most of the short story takes place in an enclosed crimson-curtained room. The singular space perhaps suggests his immobility and inability to escape death. Although Kawabata uses surrealist techniques in illustrating Eguchi's dreams and memories, he does not necessarily engage in the revolutionary, liberating ideals that the French surrealists would have insisted upon. Indeed, there is no indication that fantasies relieve him of his anxieties; instead they seem only to perpetuate his sadness. Within this difference, one can perhaps trace how surrealism evolved from an aesthetics of liberation in 1920s French poetry to an aesthetics of meditation and elegiac reflection in a modern Japanese short story.

Rather than dialogue or explicit statement, Eguchi's character and the entirety of "House of the Sleeping Beauties" are developed through surrealist imagery. In depicting Eguchi's desires, memories, and dreams, and all of their symbolic peculiarities, Kawabata provides us with a window, albeit one that is obscured, into his psyche and inner life. As much as this narrative captures the ethos of the French surrealists, Kawabata's subdued tone and references to nature, recalling traditional Japanese literature and culture, lack the impetus for liberation that propelled the founders of the surrealist movement.

### ***Hard-Boiled Wonderland and the End of the World***

Haruki Murakami's novel *Hard-Boiled Wonderland and the End of the World* offers another text through which to contemplate how French surrealist poetics materialize in modern Japanese literature. The novel features alternating stories, one that follows a "Calcutec," an information processor living in a futuristic Japan and the other, a dream interpreter trapped inside a fantastic walled city. Although split, the two worlds cannot be understood independently of one another, as their storylines are parallel and overlap at critical moments. The same motifs of desire, dreams, and ambiguity that were central to "House of the Sleeping Beauties" also play a major role in *Hard-Boiled Wonderland and the End of the World*. Unlike "House of the Sleeping Beauties," which is structured around surrealist images based in Eguchi's memory, poetic in style, this novel develops through frenetic action in multiple spaces. Murakami's surrealism is ultimately concerned with the duality of the mind and the nature of the true self.

While not as omnipresent as in “House of the Sleeping Beauties,” eroticism does appear in *Hard-Boiled Wonderland and the End of the World*. In the beginning of the novel, the Calcutec explains his sexual preference for “young, beautiful, fat women” over “plain fat woman,” declaring the girl in the pink suit to be “[his] kind of chubby” (Murakami 9). In a humorous and completely idiosyncratic way, Murakami grapples with the same questions that fascinated the French surrealists: what governs the seemingly arbitrary laws of human eroticism and how does sexual preference play into one’s identity? Indeed, the Calcutec himself reflects on this mystery when he asks, “What about her touches me? I can feel some deep layer of my consciousness lifting toward the surface. What can it mean? The secret lies in distant darkness” (Murakami 41). Rearticulating the views of the French poets, Murakami suggests that sexual attraction originates in the unconscious and although its meaning is unknown, it still exerts a compelling force on the psyche.

As in “House of the Sleeping Beauties,” a dismembering gaze serves as an expression of desire in *Hard-Boiled Wonderland and the End of the World*. When the Calcutec envisions the girl in the pink suit, he does not picture her entire body:

I thought about the chubby girl. I thought about her square earrings and pink suit and pink high heels. I thought about her body, her calves and the flesh around her neck and the build of her face and...well, things like that. I could recall each detail with alarming clarity, but the composite was indistinct (Murakami 73).

The narrator magnifies the individual parts of the girl, contributing to an anatomical and fetishistic representation of lust. Here and elsewhere Murakami draws the reader’s attention to details normally overlooked or unnoticed--earrings, calves, the flesh of the neck--bringing into focus that which is usually out of immediate view. Corresponding to

vision of the French surrealists, the pieces of the body are exalted at the expense of the whole: “the composite is indistinct.” In this erotically charged description, Murakami is again portraying the mystery of human attraction, and inciting us to think about why one is drawn to certain people or certain attributes and repelled by others.

This motif of desire is just one caveat of the novel’s larger overlying interest in the unconscious and its relation to identity. Their link is perhaps best explained through the metaphor of a “black box.” The black box contains all the content and mechanisms that allow information to be processed, but the possessor of the box has no knowledge of the interior and is incapable of accessing it. Similarly, the unconscious is equipped to comprehend and generate thought, but the individual does not know its composition, nor how it works. In Murakami’s vision, it is this inner system, which remains enclosed that determines one’s identity. As the Professor explains to the Calcutec:

“Yes, that’s correct. Each individual behaves on the basis of his individual mnemonic makeup. No two human beings are alike; it’s a question of identity. And what is identity? The cognitive system arisin’ from the aggregate memories of that individual’s past experiences.” (Murakami 255)

In other words, an individual’s “black box,” as the composite of his memories and experiences, is also the source of his individuality, separating one human being from the next. Throughout *Hard-boiled Wonderland and the End of the World*, the narrator is preoccupied with opening the metaphorical black box and touching his core conscious in its purest form.

As we have seen, the discovery of the unconscious was a major motivation behind the poetic activities of Bretonian surrealism. In her account of the movement, Mary Ann

Caws argues that surrealism was not about the dissolution of the self or the losing of the self, as certain critics have maintained, rather “To find oneself but to find oneself *other* would be the great project of the whole surrealist enterprise” (20). This description is applicable to the narrator’s quest for his “core consciousness” in *Hard-Boiled Wonderland and the End of the World*. His search is one that seeks to form a connection with the other, and thereby confirm his existence. Because his conscious state is not sufficient to explain to him why he is the “key to the outcome of the whole idiotic infowars,” he is in pursuit of some part of his being that is not immediately present (Murakami 269). In portraying a narrator who is physically cut into two, Murakami rejects a unitary or singular conception of self in favor of one that is divided and haunted by otherness. Such a depiction of identity mirrors one that is found in French surrealist poetics, in which the subject is fissured and destabilized.

What does the other look according to Murakami? In the novel, he presents the core consciousness as a *narrative*. The Calcutec’s unconscious is the story of the town that is being told in “the End of the World” section:

“Well, it’s like this. Deep in your consciousness there’s this core that is imperceptible to yourself. In my case, the core is a town. A town with a river flowing through it and a high brick wall surrounding it. None of the people in the town can leave. Only unicorns can go in and out. The unicorns can absorb the egos of the townspeople like blotter paper and carry them outside the wall. So the people in the town have no ego, no self. I live in the town—or so the story goes. I don’t know any more than that, since I haven’t actually seen any of this with my own eyes.” (Murakami 359)

The inner self is thus imagined as a fantastical tale of the town. Unlike Kawabata’s portrayal of the unconscious, which takes the form of symbols *within* the text, Murakami’s unconscious is the text itself, delivering an account of connected events. In

other words, whereas the unconscious is made up of disjointed images in “House of the Sleeping Beauties,” in *Hard-Boiled Wonderland and the End of the World*, it is elaborated into a coherent fiction, satisfying the human desire for narrative. In this way, Murakami’s representation of the unconscious also diverges from the poetic interpretations of the founding French surrealists. Whereas the French poets deconstructed language through their poems in order to expose the unconscious, here Murakami builds up language, through storytelling.

As parts of the unconscious, dreams are a tool for the protagonist in Murakami’s novel to understand himself. Again differing from Kawabata’s short story, dreams are not conjured in the imagination of the narrator but are rather contained in exterior objects (the unicorn skulls), from which they are projected into the Dreamreader’s head. They are treated as commodity, as items to be read, organized, and stored in a library, further equating the unconscious with literature. Despite the fact that they are handled so methodically, it is difficult to extract any meaning from the images that the skulls produce. We are only told that their contents lead to a sense of self, that they offer a bridge to the unconscious:

The voice of the light remains ever so faint; images quiet as ancient constellations float across the dome of my dawning mind. They are indistinct fragments that never merge into a sensate picture...For while I recognize that the old dreams relate to something in me, I am lost. (Murakami 184)

Dreams are represented as a stream of images that resist comprehension, yet at the same time conduct an inner vision, which is perhaps symbolized by the Dreamreader’s blindness. His inability to see in the daylight suggests new ways of seeing and perceiving that reveal aspects of one’s identity. Elsewhere, the relationship between dreams and the

self is confirmed when the Dreamreader explains that the reveries leave traces, “And we can follow those traces, like footstep in the snow...to oneself” (Murakami 185). Marks of individuality are not to be found in reality but rather in the unconscious dimension of dreams, a view that was championed by the French surrealists, as well.<sup>29</sup>

In addition to this fixation on dreams and the unconscious, the mixing of the marvelous with the mundane in *Hard-boiled Wonderland and the End of the World* also recalls French surrealism. Breton’s notion of “le merveilleux quotidien” (the everyday marvelous) is illustrated when Murakami inserts ordinary objects in unusual contexts, creating juxtaposition that disorients the reader. In one scene for example, the scientist’s granddaughter and the Calcutec suspect that they are being followed by their rival Semiotecs. The girl asks, “Do you think we are in for a chase?” and the narrator responds: “No idea...Just curious, how about a hamburger? It’d be quick” (Murakami 189). The couple proceeds to a drive-in where he orders a burger and coke, and she a double cheeseburger with french fries and a hot chocolate; afterwards they return to the bizarre subterranean laboratory, which they discover has been ransacked.<sup>30</sup> Here and elsewhere in the novel, Murakami presents a series of completely incongruous events, lodging a casual and wholly familiar action, such as eating hamburgers, amidst tense and wholly unfamiliar situations. Guided by a spirit of spontaneity, the characters do the

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<sup>29</sup> In the Surrealist Manifesto Breton advocates dreams, rather than reality, as the pathway to truth: “Why should I not expect from the sign of the dream more than I expect from a degree of consciousness which is daily more acute? Can't the dream also be used in solving the fundamental questions of life?” Certainly one of the fundamental questions of life is one’s true identity.

<sup>30</sup> I would like to emphasize here that Murakami’s quotidian elements are never indicative of everyday life in Japan. Hamburgers and coke, in this instance, as well as references elsewhere in the novel (Bob Dylan records, “gateaux” from a French patisserie, Dostoyevsky’s *Rudi*, etc.) contribute to a culturally non-specific environment. This is also reinforced by the fact that none of the characters have conventional names, but are instead identified by their profession or by their physical attributes. Whereas Kawabata’s brand of surrealism draws from the Zen poetic tradition, Murakami’s surrealist world is essentially a universal one.

opposite of what is expected. Murakami thus frees the text from linear or logical restrictions, and explores the possibility of different realities. His intertwining of the imaginary with the real is a common practice in surrealist art and literature and is reflective of a yearning to reach beyond such dualities.

This convergence of the quotidian and the exceptional also emerges in *Hard-Boiled Wonderland and the End of the World* through moments of the uncanny.<sup>31</sup> The narrators in Murakami's novel often experience sensations they have never felt before, invaded by impressions that seem completely foreign and unknown. Usually occurring in silence or solitude, the moments are fleeting yet unsettling in their strangeness. In the opening lines of the novel, for instance, the Calcutec finds himself in an elevator unable to discern its direction:

The elevator continued its impossibly slow ascent. Or at least I imagined it was ascent. There was no telling for sure: it was so slow that all sense of direction simply vanished. It could have been going down for all I knew, or maybe it wasn't moving at all. But let's just assume it was going up. Merely a guess. Maybe I'd gone up twelve stories, then down three. Maybe I'd circle the globe. How would I know? (Murakami 1)

Like Kawabata, Murakami uses simple language to convey uncertainty, considering multiple explanations (both ordinary and extraordinary) for a singular situation. Again, the text hovers the frontier between the real and the fantastic; is the elevator just a common elevator or is it instead an unfamiliar vehicle of world travel? Such confusion is embedded in another description from the Dreamreader's point of view: "I am in my bed, my room. But the impression of everything is altered. The scene seems recreated from

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<sup>31</sup> Hal Foster in his book *Compulsive Beauty* argues that the concept of the uncanny is at the heart of surrealism. First proposed as a psychoanalytic theory by Freud, the uncanny seeks "in which repressed material return in ways that disrupt unitary identity, aesthetic norms, and social order" (7).

my memory” (Murakami 167). Here the return of a memory, the emergence of the unconscious, creates an “altered” perception, rendering the narrator incapable of establishing limits or frames for what is in his head versus what exists in reality. In this fashion, the uncanny in *Hard-Boiled Wonderland* prevents a straightforward representation of what is happening in the story, and in doing so evokes the fractured vision of the surrealists.

The mixing of the real and the fantastic that Murakami portrays in *Hard-Boiled Wonderland* can also be viewed as expressions of magical realism. In addition to surrealism, Murakami’s fiction is often categorized under this genre, which broadly stated, merges realistic narrative settings with bizarre, magical elements.<sup>32</sup> Surrealism and magical realism have a number of commonalities, including their interest in the marvelous, their abandonment of logic, and their potential for liberation, and as a result they are often confused with one another. According to Maggie Bowers, however there is a fundamental difference between the two literary strains:

Surrealism is most distanced from magical realism [in that] the aspects that it explores are associated not with material reality but with the imagination and the mind, and in particular it attempts to express the “inner life” and psychology of humans through art. (Bowers 22)

*Hard-Boiled Wonderland and the End of the World*, like so much of Murakami’s fiction, straddles this line that Bowers identifies between surrealism and magical realism. The “Hard-Boiled Wonderland” section indeed resembles a “material reality” with physical

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<sup>32</sup> Literary magical realism originated in Latin America around the mid twentieth century. Alejo Carpentier, considered to be the founder movement, lived in Paris during the 1920s and 1930s and was very much influenced by the European surrealists. He developed the concept of “marvelous realism” as a way to address the “non-material aspects of life” in Latin-American literature (Bowers 13).

details that are recognizable to the reader such as food, brands, and pop culture references. The magical elements, such as the INKlings, are accepted as a natural part of this reality. At the same time, however, the inner life that concerns surrealism is also embedded into the novel as well, as the basis for the “End of the World” section. In combining experience and fantasy, Murakami’s work mixes different genre and narrative styles, as well.

Although *Hard-Boiled Wonderland* displays this freedom of form, the protagonists seem to be constricted or weighed down by a number of forces. Like the velvet-curtained room in “House of the Sleeping Beauties,” the seemingly impenetrable wall that surrounds the city entraps the Dreamreader. He essentially becomes a prisoner in the town where his duties are dictated to him by the Gatekeeper and his shadow is forced to live in the “Shadow Grounds.” The shadow’s last lines to the Dreamreader foretell of a hopeless entrapment within the mind: “‘You’ll be trapped for all eternity...Not as long as you are sealed inside yourself. Search as you might, you will never know the clarity of distance without me’ (Murakami 399).” Even though the Calcutec is perhaps not limited by any physical boundaries, the threat of the Semiotecs and his inability to understand why he is at the center of this human encryption experiment prove equally repressive. As in “House of the Sleeping Beauties,” there is no grand escape, no implication of emancipation that the French surrealists demanded.

In *Hard-Boiled Wonderland and the End of the World*, Murakami assumes a surrealist angle in depicting the protagonist’s confrontation with questions such as who am I, and what does my identity look like? Murakami turns the unconscious inside out, delving into the mysteries of eroticism and dreams in search for a sense of self. The

combining of the mundane with the marvelous in his work, recalling the techniques of both French surrealism and magical realism, only further complicates a coherent, intelligible portrait of the narrator's identity, as well as the text in general. Eschewing Japanese literary tradition, Murakami ultimate focus lies in the human brain and how it both defines and alienates the individual.

The stories of Kawabata and Murakami are indeed different, indicating the scope of surrealist work in modern Japanese literature. While "House of the Sleeping Beauties" refers to Japan's tradition in its meditative, solemn tone, *Hard-Boiled Wonderland* evokes a globalized future with its fast-paced action. Rather than trying to define *Japanese* surrealism, perhaps we can simply continue to identify and reflect on the forms in which it manifests today. In the case of these two texts, surrealism primarily serves as a pathway for navigating the inner mind.

## **EPILOGUE**

The evolution of surrealism from avant-garde French poetics to contemporary Japanese fiction demonstrates how literary ideas can transform over time and space, as well as across linguistic and cultural boundaries.

A comparative analysis of the histories of surrealism in France and Japan reveals that the movement in both locations was spurred by a desire to shift perception of reality and the individual's place within it. However, the realities of France and Japan in the 1920s and 30s were different, and as such, surrealism developed in response to the particular political, societal, and cultural situations of these two locations. The optimistic message of freedom and revolution that Breton's circle promoted was born out of a resistance to the despair of WWI and the pessimism of Dada. Although it remained open to artistic experimentation, the practices of French surrealism were self-willed, involving formal meetings and official doctrine exemplified by the *Manifesto of Surrealism*. In Japan, surrealism began first and foremost as an imported phenomenon, entering the country through translated texts printed in coterie magazines like *Shobi \* majutsu \* gakusetsu* and *Shi to Shiron*. Echoing the dissonance of modernity and modernism, the aesthetic forms of surrealism were not just blindly absorbed, but corresponded to wider transformations overturning the societal status quo, as well as the conventions set by literary establishment. Shûzo Takiguchi, Junzaburō Nishiwaki, as well as Katue Kitasono were all instrumental in encouraging the writing of original surrealist poetry in Japan. Although they made several efforts to forge a collective identity, such as through their manifesto "A Note," Japanese surrealism never seems to have become quite the deliberate group adventure that French surrealism was, and instead remained more of an individual enterprise.

The Japanese encounter with French surrealism is a rich example of creative cross-cultural exchange as it invokes interactions of Eastern and Western avant-gardes, of literary texts, and of linguistic systems, and furthermore raises the question of influence in these interactions. In addition to being ignored, early Japanese surrealist authors were accused of imitating French surrealism or inaccurately representing their visions. These points of view, however, can be located within a specific understanding of the “avant-garde” that privileges Western voices at the expense of non-Western voices. Rather than simulation of French surrealism, the work of the Japanese surrealists can be, drawing on the theories of Harold Bloom, considered a *creative misreading* or *misinterpretation* of them. Translation was key to this misreading, as linguistic difference contributed to a reworking of surrealist concepts on the part of the Japanese, as well as a break down of traditional Japanese language. Through a process of reading and rewriting, Japanese authors took possession of French surrealism and reconfigured its scheme in accordance with their own artistic purposes.

Tracking the place of the aesthetic and philosophical program of Andre Breton’s group in two modern Japanese texts illuminates this progression more precisely. “House of the Sleeping Beauties” and *Hard-Boiled Wonderland and the End of the World* illustrate and reinterpret concepts that were fundamental to the founding French surrealists through their evocative rendering of eroticism, unconscious, and ambiguity. Although their work may not express the same sentiment of liberation that was imperative to the French circle, Kawabata and Murakami have used surrealist techniques to question, expand, and invert our understanding of the human being.

Does the diminished emphasis on freedom in these works indicate that the goals of French surrealism have failed? In *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, Peter Bürger looks at how avant-gardes are altered in their reception, arguing that "art as an institution neutralizes the political content of the individual work" (Bürger 90). Japanese surrealism, lacking the same revolutionary vigor that Breton aspired for, can perhaps be viewed as confirmation of Bürger's theory. Indeed, there is a disparity in French surrealism's objectives and its achievements. Accordingly, John Solt writes:

Founder André Breton was aware that in a capitalist society surrealism would probably end up as just another trick in the arsenal of advertisers, rather than fulfilling the ideal of self-liberation of the psyche that he and the other writers and artists in the movement had envisaged. Present-day Japan is perhaps proof of Breton's realism. (Solt 46)

Whether or not surrealism is "just another trick in the arsenal of advertisers" in present-day Japan perhaps requires further research (certainly, this does not seem to be applicable to the surrealism in Kawabata and Murakami's works) but Solt's comments suggest how the Japanese movement serves a function that is decidedly less ideological than its original manifestation.

But then again, maybe we should not think of surrealism in terms of success and failure, the kind of binary oppositions that the surrealists themselves would have subverted. Indeed, Japanese surrealism does not represent the disappointment of Breton's vision, but another voice in this multivocal, forever-evolving conversation that is surrealism. Outlining this evolution uncovers certain patterns in how humans, in different parts of the world and at different times, think and write, but perhaps more strongly, how easily those patterns become modified.

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