NOTE TO USERS

Surface tension: Kuki Shūzō's *iki* as a posture of resignation and resistance.

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Kuki Shūzo was a philosopher at the margins of the Kyoto School; his most significant contribution was the short work *'Iki' no kōzō*, in which he located Japanese uniqueness in the Edo *démimonde* aesthetic of *iki*, style or chic. This thesis surveys the major Western critiques of Kuki's aesthetics, focussing particularly on the work done by Peter Dale, Leslie Pincus, and Harry Harootunian revealing Kuki's borrowing from European modernism, especially fascist modernism, and attempts to uncover an alternative genealogy for Kuki in Japanese Pure Land thought. It finally asserts that Kuki's valorization of resignation, and his own retreat into the aesthetic, can be read as a form of resistance to Japanese nationalism.

Kuki Shūzō était un philosophe à la marge de l'école de Kyoto; sa plus importante contribution fut son court ouvrage *'Iki' no kōzō* dans lequel il argumenta que l'esthétique d'Edo démimonde de l'"iki", style ou chic, est la source de la specificité japonaise. Cette thèse étudie les majeures critiques du Monde Occidental dans l'esthétique de Kuki, en s'intéressant plus particulièrement aux travaux de Peter Dale, Leslie Pincus, et Harry Harootunian qui révèlent l'emprunt de Kuki au modernisme Européen, notamment le modernisme fasciste, et s'évertue à découvrir une généalogie alternative à la pensée du "Pure Land" japonais de Kuki. Finalement, nous affirmons que la valorisation de la résignation de Kuki et son propre retirement dans l'esthétique peuvent être lus comme une forme de résistance au nationalisme Japonais.

I would like above all to express my deepest gratitude to my supervisor, Professor G. Victor Sōgen Hori, who introduced me to the paradoxes of Pure Land Buddhism as an undergraduate student, and to those of the Kyoto School as a graduate student, and who has been unfailingly generous, insightful, and good-humoured as I have struggled to express my intuitions about both. Professor Anne McKnight offered a compassionate and very insightful second reading. I would like also to thank Professor Katherine Young for the many kindnesses she has shown me, and to express my appreciation for all of my colleagues at the Faculty of Religious Studies, who are so relentlessly smart and funny. Thanks to Sabine Minsky for her assistance with translation from English to French, and to Jacob Eliosoff, who forestalled my sincere unhappiness by both reading the thesis and saving a copy to his network drive. Finally, profound thanks to my parents for their boundless support.

The translations of Baudelaire 1922 are my own; I have used them where Jonathan Mayne's more felicitous translation of "The painter of modern life" did not include the passages I was looking for. The translations of Camus 1981 are likewise my own, as are the translations of Kuki 1935, from Omodaka Hisayuki's French translation of Kuki's *Guzensai no mondai.*

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INTRODUCTION

Kuki Shūzō died in Kyoto on May 6, 1941, seven months before the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor and fourteen months before the infamous symposium on "Overcoming Modernity"[1]. He is nevertheless strongly identified by both Japanese and Western critics with a "fascist turn in Japanese cultural discourse" (Pincus 1996, 247); Karatani Kōjin tells us that "notwithstanding his discriminating intellect, Kuki was a willing participant in the 'overcoming the modern' movement of the prewar fascist period" (Karatani 1989, 266). He is considered to be one of the principal contributors to the interwar project of rescuing, or if you prefer, producing, Japanese difference (Karatani 1998, 271; Pincus 1989, 3; Harootunian 2000b, 212; Clark 199). His contribution was *'Iki' no kōzō*, *The Structure of 'Iki'*, a short book in which Kuki suggests that we can find in any language words in which "the specific mode of being of a given people unfolds itself as something central in the form of meaning and language" (Kuki 1997, 29). For the French, he suggests, we might consider *esprit* as a word that "reflects the nature and whole history of the French people... we cannot discover anything quite identical even if we look for it in the vocabulary of other peoples" (Kuki 1997, 29); for the Germans he gives us *Sehnsucht*, a word which has an "organic relation" to German experience (Kuki 1997, 30). So there is no argument here that uniqueness itself is unique to the Japanese; there is no claim I can detect that the Japanese are *more* unique than anyone else. Kuki is interested, however, in establishing

[1]The symposium, held in July of 1942 and organized by the magazine *Literary World*, gathered together thirteen Japanese cultural critics to discuss the state of modern Japan in relation to modern Europe; as an event it is often invoked as evidence of the complicity of Japanese intellectuals in the construction of pro-national, pro-militarist, anti-Western propaganda, although Minamoto Ryōen has pointed out that not all of the participants were in agreement on how to overcome modernity, nor on whether or not it ought to be overcome (Minamoto 208).

that there is something expressible in Japanese which cannot be expressed in another language and, therefore, something experienceable in Japanese which cannot be experienced in another language. The word he chooses to treat is *iki*: "whilst European languages possess words which are merely bare analogies of *iki*, words which have completely identical significance cannot be discovered" (Kuki 1997, 32-33).

Because he sees particular words as generative of particular kinds of experiences, and because he understands these words as always already embedded within national languages, translation is, for Kuki, a real threat to Japanese culture: he criticizes Japanese intellectuals for "their indolence where they present craftsmen and employees with foreign loan-words just as they are" (Clark 205) and despairs over the transformation of Tokyo into an English place — "When I walked around the city, wherever I looked, English words were everywhere, on all the billboards. One had the impression that this was a colony, like Singapore or Colombo. Even the newspapers were full of foreign words, and somehow it made me feel ashamed" (cited in Pincus 1996, 18). Kuki's view of the centrality of language is inspired by his reading of Henri Bergson. Bergson's treatment of particularity is at the heart of *'Iki' no kōzō*'s attempt to wrestle with "the problem of *universalia*" (Kuki 1997, 33); it is by reference to Bergson that Kuki makes his claim for *iki* as a unique mode of being:

> Bergson says that when we recall the past in scenting the fragrance of the rose, we do not associate ideas of the past with the fragrance of the rose. We scent the recollection of the past. The fixed, invariable fragrance of the rose, something shared and conceptually generic for all, does not exist as an actuality. There are only particular fragrances with different contents. (Kuki 1997, 33)

Now Bergson argued that a thing could be understood in two ways, from the outside or from the inside. To understand a thing from the outside means to understand it conceptually, relatively, by analogy with other things. To understand a thing from the

inside means to grasp it as an incomparable absolute — "what I experience will depend neither on the point of view I may take up in regard to the object, since I am inside the object itself, nor on the symbols by which I may translate the motion, since I have rejected all translations in order to possess the original" (Bergson 1912, 3). Bergson's notion of possessing the original had a profound influence on Kuki's teacher, Nishida Kitarō, whose movement "from voluntarism to a sort of intuitionism" (Abe Masao in Nishida 1990, xxii) rests on his development of the resonance between Mahāyāna Buddhism and Bergson's call to place "oneself within an object in order to coincide with what is unique in it and consequently inexpressible" (Bergson 1912, 7).

Kuki also takes up this discussion of originality, but he literalizes it: in "Bergson in Japan," he suggests that it was Bergson who "kept us from remaining satisfied with 'translation'; he encouraged us to go directly to the 'original'" (Kuki 1928, 72). Here 'translation' obviously carries the sense of translation from another language; Bergson's injunction to grasp the thing from the inside becomes a mandate to do Japanese philosophy in Japanese. The Japanese language is "home" for Kuki in the Heideggerian sense — it is his house of being. This literalizing of Bergson has another effect as well, inasmuch as it suggests that philosophy, if it is to be Japanese, should be about Japanese people; it should be about a reality that the Japanese philosopher can grasp from the inside — "There is one reality, at least, which we all seize from within, by intuition and not by simple analysis. It is our own personality in its flowing through time—our self which endures. We may sympathize intellectually with nothing else, but we certainly sympathize with our own selves" (Bergson 1912, 9). Kuki locates a Japanese reality in the aesthetic mode of *iki*.

Iki is the mode that flourished in the floating world culture of the Tokugawa; it is a style Kuki associates with the residents of Edo who defined themselves in opposition to traditional mores — "The 'genuine' Edoite took pride in the fact that the conventional and frightful did not live east of Hakone" (Kuki 1997, 40). *Iki* is comprised of three components: *bitai* (coquetry), *ikiji* (brave composure), and *akirame* (resignation). Taken together, these three things determine stylish conduct for the geisha. Any Edoite might aspire to have *iki* but the geisha is set apart — as Mark Driscoll puts it, men have *iki*, women are *iki*. Terry Eagleton tells us that "Aesthetics is born as a discourse of the body" (Eagleton 13) and this is certainly the case with Kuki's aesthetics; *iki* is borne by the geisha's body. In *'Iki' no kōzō*, Kuki struggles to make Japan remember the body of the geisha as a body of leisure, a body of play, as against the capitalist body of production and consumption (Harootunian 2000b, 208). Now as we'll see later, the Edo aesthetic did have certain things to say about the organization of the state; the residents of Edo willfully substituted aesthetic judgment for ethical judgment, and their "very style of walking [was] a politics all in itself" (Eagleton 336). The ability to carry off the *iki* style successfully was the mark of the real Edo-ite; style was proof of authenticity.

Kuki obviously shared this concern with authenticity, with originality in the sense of coming from the inside. In this he is not much different from the culture critics of the Frankfurt School, who similarly sought to defend European culture against the commodifying forms of capitalism and mass culture; like Kuki, Walter Benjamin was interested in the reconstruction of memory; like Kuki, Benjamin was fascinated by Baudelaire and the figure of the dandy; and like Kuki, Benjamin saw the collective as a body which needed to be "reinscribed by the power of the sensuous image" (Eagleton 336).

However, when Benjamin describes mechanization as producing class struggle, he writes as a Westerner describing a Western mode; Benjamin describes a transcendence of modernity from within not only because he's a Marxist, but because there is, in Benjamin's thought, no real notion of a space outside of the West. In Japan, the movements of mechanization, modernization, and Westernization are not easily distinguished — "The impact of shock and speed was so jarring in the transformation of society that Japanese were forced to find a new word for it, *supīdo*" (Harootunian 2000b, 210) — so that all can be understood not as problems from within requiring transcendence, but as problems from without requiring resistance or refusal. This has meant, rightly or wrongly, that Western critics can use the protest aesthetics of Walter Benjamin to critique the protest aesthetics of Kuki Shūzō as nationalist, ultra-nationalist, or fascist. It is not that they see no analogies between Kuki and Western thinkers — as we shall see, this could not be further from the truth — but they are highly selective in drawing their analogies.

I want to identify myself as basically uncritical of Kuki's claim that *iki* is a uniquely Japanese mode of being. To this extent (only) I suppose I align myself with Barthes insofar as I accept that Kuki's aesthetics describe a foreign body that I do not inhabit, and that cannot inhabit me. Kuki, following Bergson, certainly does provide a method for knowing *iki* from the outside; this method allows for a conceptual understanding by way of analogy or relation. His Western critics have in one sense taken up Kuki's method, treating his thought by developing analogies with European modernism. What I am about to do is attempt an undermining of these analogies. I hope to show first that Kuki's thought contests with and opposes its European sources as much as it builds from them, and second that it has deep though not "natural" roots in Japanese thought. I'll begin with the analogy

that currently dominates Western scholarship on *'Iki' no kōzō*: the analogy between Kuki's aesthetic theory and the aesthetics that underpinned Fascism in Europe.

In my first chapter, I'll look at how this analogy serves some of Kuki's Western critics, what kind of aesthetics of the body European Fascism produced, and describe two ways in which, however useful it might be, this analogy fails to help us understand what an *iki* body is supposed to be like. In my second chapter, I'll examine another analogical reading of Kuki that links him to Europe, and suggest that while it is true that Kuki borrows from French aesthetic philosophy, it is also true that he anticipates certain key developments in French absurdist thought. The third chapter is devoted to an account of my alternative genealogy for Kuki that locates him, if uneasily, inside the realm of Japanese Buddhist philosophy by linking him with Shinran. The final chapter attempts to reimagine Kuki as a figure whose relationship to the nation was more ambivalent than has been previously suggested.

CHAPTER ONE — ORIGINALITY

Every day the urge grows stronger to get hold of an object at very close range by way of its likeness, its reproduction. Unmistakably, reproduction as offered by picture magazines and newsreels differs from the image seen by the unarmed eye. Uniqueness and permanence are as closely linked in the latter as are transitoriness and reproducibility in the former.
Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction"

Walter Benjamin seems to be in the throes of a rare moment of intellectual optimism when he declares that he is going to "brush aside a number of outmoded concepts, such as creativity and genius, eternal value and mystery" in favour of a new vocabulary, a set of concepts that "differ from the more familiar terms in that they are completely useless for the purposes of Fascism" (Benjamin 218). Among Benjamin's offerings on this score is the notion of the aura. The aura is what shines forth when we resist the prying impulse; it is the thing's "unique existence at the place where it happens to be" (Benjamin 220). In some sense, then, the aura is a thing's originality: it exists only in the original; it is absent from every reproduction.

Reading Japan as a reproduction

Writing less than fifty years later, Peter Dale claims that the notion of the aura has in fact been pressed into service by thinkers with a Fascist bent. In his discussion of Kuki Shūzō, Dale encourages us to think of Japanese nationalism as a kind of country-wide temper tantrum: Kuki's work, he tells us, consists in "'dressing up empirical words with aura'.... the polemical tool favoured by the reactionary in his battle to preserve the mystique of tradition from the logic of a mature modernity" (Dale 72-73). This language of maturity is not accidental — by the time he gets to Kuki, Dale has already informed us that lurking behind Japanese critiques of the West, "one cannot but sense a narcissistic antagonism to the father" (Dale 40), and he will go on to conclude that writers on Japanese uniqueness, having grown up in a culture which encourages "early, mother-fixated

dependence" (Dale 110), are attempting to "overcome a diffuse sense of inferiority to the West, a West which, in the first place, we must understand as a symbolic entity, as the image of a hostile diversity, the Oedipal, the social, the presence of the father within the self" (Dale 176). Dale clearly means for us to understand any claim about the unique modality of Japaneseness as both childish and imitative. This is what constitutes a killing blow in the field of Western criticism of *nihonjinron*, or the study of Japanese uniqueness: even in attempting to identify Japanese difference, *nihonjinron* scholars are hopelessly derivative, recycling borrowed material, and "often what is residually original is the result of the incompetence of the transmitter" (Dale 215).

I don't want to dwell too much on Dale; a full response to his Freudian reading of Japanese intellectual history would be out of the scope of this short paper and beyond the capacity of my own limited knowledge of psychoanalytic theory. I do, however, want to draw to your attention the apparatus which has been built up around Kuki and which seems to me to have the function of obscuring what is original in his work. It is this absolute resistance to the idea that anything in Japanese philosophy might not be a hand-me-down which troubles me; it does not seem to me that it should be so very difficult to imagine that "no matter how much the non-European worlds modernize or are influenced by Europe, there remain cultures and traditions that do not ultimately derive from Europe" (Ōhashi Ryōsuke in Minamoto 199).

Dale strikes me as being far more interested in Kuki's psyche than in his thought; he devotes much of his chapter on Kuki to an exploration of the way in which Kuki's relationship with Martin Heidegger was defined by the former's "attempt to impress his maître à penser with his own inimitable 'sophistication'" (Dale 73). Kuki's own personal

narcissism, his faintly pathetic effort to dazzle Heidegger with the flashiness of *iki*, is made to serve as a miniature version of the whole *nihonjinron* project. There are two serious problems here. The first is that Dale's analysis of Kuki centres almost entirely around his reading of Heidegger's "A Dialogue on Language." Dale characterizes the "Dialogue" as a document that "fictively recreates [Heidegger's] discussions with Kuki" (Dale 69). A cursory look at the "Dialogue" should have the reader wondering whether this is quite fair: the "Japanese Inquirer" with whom Heidegger discussed the problems of language was not Kuki but Tezuka Tomio, a one-time student of Kuki's. Whatever elements of Kuki's thought appear in "A Dialogue" appear, then, as presented by Heidegger — who declares "In my dialogues with Kuki, I never had more than a distant inkling of what that word [*iki*] says" (Heidegger 2) — and by Tezuka, who is made to confess "I can report only of Kuki's explanations [of Heidegger's hermeneutics]. They never did become fully clear to me...Our dialogues with Count Kuki probably failed to turn out so well" (Heidegger 9, 13). Leslie Pincus praises Dale for his "unsparing critique of this encounter" (Pincus 1996, 93), but it seems to me that there is a certain fragility to an argument which purports to critique a given encounter but which has for its source document the record of another, quite different encounter. Recent critical work on "A Dialogue" reveals still more reason to be hesitant on this point. Graham Parkes has suggested that what we really have here is a *monologue* on language: Heidegger constructed the dialogue years after meeting with Tezuka. The description of *iki* he attributes to Kuki — "sensuous radiance through whose lively delight there breaks the radiance of something suprasensuous" (Heidegger 14) — is not, in fact, Kuki's description of *iki*, nor, for that matter, is it a description of *iki* at all. This business of the sensuous and the suprasensuous is borrowed from Oskar Benl's

discussion of *yūgen* in his *Seami Motokiyo und der Geist des No-Schauspiels* (May and Parkes), a book which Heidegger has his Japanese inquirer praise enthusiastically ("In Japan, it is considered an extremely thorough piece of work, and by far the best thing you can read on the *No*-play" (Heidegger 18)).

The second, more serious problem, accounts, I think, for Dale's focus on "A Dialogue," and this is his conviction that Kuki can best be understood as a pale copy of Heidegger. This means, for Dale, that in reading Kuki, we should always keep an eye on the original: Kuki's work, he says "subtly clothes a spirit of reaction in the idiom of racial uniqueness. We remind ourselves of the intimate conjunction between Heidegger's boldly obscurantist philosophy and the brash jargon of Nazi rhetoric" (Dale 72). Dale's insistence that we think about Germany while reading about Japan allows him to do several different things. It encourages a collapsing of the categories of nationalism, ultra-nationalism, and fascism, so that the reader is discouraged from treating Kuki's claim of cultural uniqueness as something *other* than a claim of racial uniqueness and, indeed, racial superiority. It makes a point of Heidegger's complicity with National Socialism in order to suggest Kuki's guilt by association, in the same way that his position on faculty at Kyoto University — "at the time a center of pronounced right-wing thought" (Dale 68) — is meant to indicate that Kuki's thought too must be pronouncedly right-wing. And it indicates that what's unfolding in Kuki's work is a reproduction of Heidegger, and so we should be able to understand Kuki by way of Heidegger —

> If it is a somewhat disturbing proposition to assert that in order to understand the ideas in the *nihonjinron* we have to deepen our familiarity with the trajectory of German nationalism from 1808 to 1945, it is nonetheless supported by significant indications in the Japanese literature itself... In particular we might note the impact of Heidegger's ideas on such men as Kuki Shūzō. (Dale 215)

Much of what's going on here seems to me to be the result of careless argument. The fact that Kuki studied with Heidegger does not in itself constitute proof that he was under Heidegger's sway; the fact that Heidegger associated himself with German nationalism does not in itself constitute proof that Kuki was associated with the Japanese equivalent — it is not obvious that there *was* a Japanese equivalent. Dale identifies Kuki's work as possessing "a spirit of reaction" but surely reaction against the modern is not the sole preserve of reactionaries: one ought to be able, Graham Parkes argues, to claim "that many features of modernity are insalubrious, and call for resistance against them, without thereby associating oneself with the fascists among us" (Parkes 1997, 322). There is one thing, however, that Dale is doing very carefully. His insistence that we remind ourselves of Heidegger when reading Kuki is strategic. The parallel he constructs between the two is not incontestably primary; certainly the "indications" in Kuki's work on Japaneseness point us to France, not Germany. It's true that Kuki was interested in Heidegger, and it's true that Japanese philosophers have been interested in German philosophy, but this is neither the whole truth nor the sole truth. Dale describes the relationship between Japanese and German thought the way he does — Japanese writers on Japaneseness "give us at second-hand, in oriental guise, the essence of ethnocentric self-definitions already fully explored within the earlier nationalist, and often fascist wing, of European intellectual history" (Dale 215) — not only because he believes this to be true, but because this truth gives him the right to speak on the subject of Japaneseness, the very right which the *nihonjinron* insist he does not have.

Dale is confronting the problem that every Western scholar of modern Japan has to confront and that is the problem of authority. The central claim of the *nihonjinron* is that

Japaneseness is a unique mode of being in the world, that Japaneseness shines forth only from Japan. Japaneseness is Japan's property of uniqueness and its unique property — Western critics, in attempting to grasp Japaneseness, destroy Japaneseness. This means that only a critic who is situated *within* Japaneseness has the authority to speak about Japaneseness. What then is a Western scholar to do? We can choose to follow Edward Said, and treat Western scholarship as discursively constructing the Orient in a way that has harmed, and can continue to harm, real people who have to live within that discourse. Understood this way, a Western desire to know the Orient becomes a politically and ethically troubling possessing of the Orient. We can choose to follow Roland Barthes, and reject any desire to know some real Orient, insisting instead that we can engage with the Orient as a fiction, so that real people somewhere continue to live their real lives unaffected by Western scholarship:

> If I want to imagine a fictive nation, I can give it an invented name, treat it definitely as a novelistic object, create a new Garabagne, so as to compromise no real country by my fantasy (though it is then that fantasy itself I compromise by the signs of literature). I can also — though in no way claiming to represent or to analyze reality itself (these being the major gestures of Western discourse) — isolate somewhere in the world (*faraway*) a certain number of features (a term employed in linguistics), and out of these features deliberately form a system. It is this system which I shall call Japan. (Barthes 3)

Here the reality of Japan itself is unimportant, and so the question of who possesses it and who does not is rendered moot — "the Orient is a matter of indifference" (Barthes 3). Dale flatly rejects both of these possibilities: both views, he suggests, have been "exploited by oriental nationalists to invalidate as tendentially imperialist any Western interpretation of Asian realities, however benign or sympathetic... In addition to the old criteria for informed competence (language competence and empathy) we are presented here with an additional rider, critical self-lobotomisation" (Dale 4, 5).

So where Barthes would suggest that Westerners can only ever talk about 'Japan', Dale argues that in fact it is the *nihonjinron* who are talking about 'Japan' (Dale 9). But look, Dale is not in fact attempting an engagement with Japan as Japan; he is attempting an engagement with Japan as fascist Germany. He is doing this because he believes that whatever "unwestern" identity Japan has constructed for itself is *bricolage*, "mere pale imitations of theories indirectly derived from the abandoned cognitive luggage of earlier Western intellectual and nationalist fashion" (Dale 6). This approach functions neither to overcome nor to set aside concerns about the insider/outsider divide. Rather, it affirms the importance of being an insider by establishing Dale *as* the insider, as having ownership over the set of Western ideas which are, on his view, being recycled by Japanese thinkers. The Japanese are thus positioned as outsiders to their own tradition. It is this attitude which allows Dale to claim, without apparent humour, that meaning is corrupted by translation from a European language to Japanese — "with Japanese translations of foreign technical terms one has some control on the distortions of concepts" (Dale 65) — but clarified by translation from Japanese to a European language — "Hisamatsu's translator clearly renders *mono* as 'things,' though Hisamatsu himself does not appear sure of its precise meaning" (Dale 66). Dale can claim to understand Japan better than the Japanese because he sees, where they do not, that Japan is just Germany, Dale's own sphere of authority in the divide between Orient and Occident.

What we see happening here is a recursive movement in which the failure of the *nihonjinron* to produce anything other than a slipshod reproduction of German fascism is the ground on which Peter Dale gains the authority to assert that the *nihonjinron* have failed to produce anything other than a slipshod reproduction of German fascism. I call

this a serious problem because it appears to me that his circular approach has made its way into the foundations of much more sophisticated work on interwar Japan and the thought of Kuki Shūzō. So we get the recent University of California at Berkeley symposium on "Culture and Fascism in Inter-war Japan", the publicity material for which echoes a Nazi agit-prop poster. We get Harry Harootunian opening a chapter on the preservation of cultural memory in his *Overcome By Modernity* with a discussion of the parallels between Weimar Germany and 1920s Japan. And we get Leslie Pincus, Kuki's most important and thorough Western critic, asserting that "While the fascist credentials of the political regime may be in doubt, the cultural landscape of Japan's interwar years bears an unmistakable resemblance to its European fascist counterparts" (Pincus 1996, 216). It seems to me at this point that no-one is sufficiently disturbed by Dale's proposition that we need to understand Germany to understand Japan; this approach has become so widely accepted that it seems somehow natural, as though it was not a strategic gaze that brings some things into view and makes other things impossible to see. When we treat Kuki this way, we cannot see the degree to which he was influenced by thinkers other than Heidegger. We cannot see the way in which he may have in fact anticipated Western thought. And we cannot see him as having developed his treatment of *iki* in a context outside of Western systems of aesthetic appropriation.

Aesthetic imaginaries and political realities

Pincus's weird relocation of fascism out of the sphere of the political and into the sphere of culture epitomizes this kind of thinking. When she claims that the cultural landscape of interwar Japan mimics the cultural landscape of European fascism, she is referencing Walter Benjamin's discussion of the nature of the relationship between

aesthetics and politics: "Mankind, which in Homer's time was an object of contemplation for the Olympian gods, now is one for itself. Its self-alienation has reached such a degree that it can experience its own destruction as an aesthetic pleasure of the first order. This is the situation of politics which Fascism is rendering aesthetic" (Benjamin 242). Look at how Pincus spins this —

> the logic of organicism — a logic that Kuki first articulated in *'Iki' no kōzō* and simply presumed in the later essays — underwrote the Japanese invasion of China in particular, and the excesses of national aestheticism in general. Those excesses were to expand on a monstrous scale: just weeks after the publication of 'Jikyoku no kansō' [Impressions of the current situation] came the Nanking massacre. At precisely the same historical moment, Walter Benjamin invoked the notion of the 'aestheticization of the political' to describe the operation of fascism in Europe. (Pincus 1996, 232)

With all due respect, it seems to me that what Pincus is doing here undermines her concern for historicity. Leaving aside her glib and slightly grotesque implication that Kuki's "Jikyoku no kansō" in some way prompted or inspired the massacre at Nanking, Pincus deploys Benjamin's thought in such a way as to dislocate it entirely from its own historical context; it is as if we are supposed to imagine that because Benjamin spoke at the same time as Kuki, he can be understood to be speaking *about* Kuki's aesthetics. He wasn't. To understand the meaning of Benjamin's "notion", we have to be aware of Benjamin's intended target.

Benjamin was not concerned with aesthetics *qua* aesthetics; he was not writing about, as Andrew Hewitt puts it, "an ahistorically reified fascist aesthetic" (Hewitt 4). Benjamin's discussion of the relationship between aesthetics and politics should be read not as sloganeering but as a response to a particular kind of aesthetic, put forward by a particular person: "The Work of Art" functions, in part, as a critique of Filippo Tommaso Marinetti. Marinetti was the founder of Futurism and a participant in the nationalist *Italia*

Irredenta movement, agitating for Italy's involvement in World War I. His founding manifesto, published in 1909, declared

> Except in struggle, there is no more beauty. No work without an aggressive character can be a masterpiece. Poetry must be conceived as a violent attack on unknown forces, to reduce and prostrate them before man... We will glorify war — the world's only hygiene — militarism, patriotism, the destructive gesture of freedom bringers, beautiful ideas worth dying for, and scorn for woman. (Marinetti 187)

So the thing is that when Marinetti talks about struggle, it is not at all obvious that he is thinking only of the struggle between nations. Futurism is not concerned with laying claim to some piece of land except as a step towards laying claim to every piece of land: "We affirm that the world's magnificence has been enriched by a new beauty; the beauty of speed. A racing car...We want to hymn the man at the wheel, who hurls the lance of his spirit across the Earth, along the circle of its orbit" (Marinetti 187). The struggle which interests Marinetti is a struggle against nature, the natural laws which, in Nishitani Keiji's words, "still rule over everything that exists, including man" (Nishitani 1982, 50). Modernity is marked — for Marinetti, for Benjamin, for Nishitani — by the struggle between the natural and the mechanical. The typical modernist move is to locate beauty in the field of the natural, protected from the mechanical. Now because mechanization is closely linked with commodification, if it is not possible to mechanize beauty, it is also not possible to commodify beauty. Beauty can resist commodification because it defies the teleology of the market — it "proposes no end to be accomplished, acknowledges no obligation or necessity, but is purely free and spontaneous" (Haven 281). Beauty then stands in opposition to modernity's commodifying gaze; it is "life's affirmative 'other'" (Hewitt 137). The body here is beautiful insofar as it is natural, insofar as being unproductive it resists commodification, insofar as it constitutes a gift from God.

Marinetti's avant-garde is distinguished from the modern by its relocation of beauty. When Marinetti proclaims there to be no beauty "except in struggle" he indicates that the avant-garde will find its beauty in the market, in the commodity form. Here beauty is invented, not given.. As it does for the modernists, "the body represents the locus of confrontation between nature and machine" (Hewitt 16), but the body now is beautiful insofar as it is unnatural, freed from natural law — "'liberate, unleash, lighten, in order to accelerate its speed and multiply a hundredfold its productivity'.... to understand the body one must understand the machine" (Hewitt 144). Benjamin repeats quite a long passage from Marinetti's manifesto on Italy's incursion into Ethiopia in "The Work of Art," and we can look to this passage for a description of what the Futurist body would be like:

> War is beautiful because it establishes man's dominion over the subjugated machinery by means of gas masks, terrifying megaphones, flame throwers and small tanks. War is beautiful because it initiates the dreamt of metalization of the human body. War is beautiful because it enriches a flowering meadow with the fiery orchids of machine guns. (Marinetti cited in Benjamin 241)

What is being proposed here is a transformation of the natural body into a cyborg body; we will have dominion over the machine only once we have merged with it, letting the machine breathe for us, speak for us, move for us. Benjamin reacts against this as an aesthetic because he sees it as functioning to make obedience enjoyable — "Fascism attempts to organize the newly created proletarian masses without affecting the property structure which the masses strive to eliminate. Fascism sees its salvation in giving the masses not their right, but instead a chance to express themselves" (Benjamin 241). A Fascist aesthetic works to make a currently existing situation tolerable, pleasurable; Futurism makes something beautiful out of "capitalism's libidinal project of self-destruction" (Hewitt 17). This is why Benjamin tells us that the aestheticization of the

political is "the logical *result* of Fascism" (Benjamin 241, my emphasis). Fascism exists in the realm of the political, in the realm of property; a Fascist aesthetic develops as a means of disguising and thus sustaining the politics.

Pincus's deployment of Benjamin, however, reverses this so that we are encouraged to think of aesthetic discourse as itself problematic, as itself always inclining towards Fascism, or, fascism. This is the only way to make sense of her suggestion that, while we might not be able to positively identify Japan's political situation with Fascism, we can nonetheless identify Japan's cultural discourse as fascistic. Benjamin's phrase linking aesthetics and politics and Fascism together, stripped of its local references, becomes a catchphrase that problematizes any aesthetic thought. Plainly, Pincus understand aesthetics as problematic — she describes *'Iki' no kōzō* as "mapp[ing] out the coordinates for an untoward intimacy between state and culture" (Pincus 1996, 229). On this model, culture is only acceptable so long as it is contained within strictly marked boundaries; any involvement of the aesthetic and the political is offensive, so much so that under Pincus's index entry for "National aestheticism" we find "See also Fascism".

This understanding of aesthetics is, on my view, not sufficiently attentive to how aesthetics functions as a field. The judgment of taste is personal, yes, but not strictly personal; on Kant's model, the judgment of taste begins with the particular ("to each his own") but must, if it is to produce aesthetic satisfaction, carry on to the universal: "The general (or universal) is not given prior to the activity of reflection, but only through it and after it...satisfaction is felt when the reflective subject observes an agreement between the real and his requirement (agreement between what is and what ought to be)" (Marra 1999, 3).

In a secular society, agreement on what is beautiful stands in as a substitute for agreement on what is good or true; it serves as "a new bond... to keep members of communities together" (Marra 1999, 3). This is why Michele Marra identifies aesthetics as "a modern mechanism that is responsible for a number of hermeneutical strategies directly related to the production of subject and state" (Marra 1999, 1); on this view, state and culture are always in some way intimate. Pincus makes use of Lacoue-Labarthe's evocative phrase "national aestheticism" to describe Kuki's aesthetic theory, but it seems to me that Marra's claim puts the appropriateness into doubt: while Lacoue-Labarthe may be justified in identifying Heidegger's aesthetics as "national" and also tending toward fascism, it is not self-evident that any aesthetics which is "national" is therefore fascistic. That is to say, it is not obvious that proposing a national aesthetics is necessarily problematic, or rather, it is not obvious that an aesthetic has ever been proposed which was not in some way national.

We know that the European modernists were interested in critiquing society; they did so by positing a gap between art and life such that it could be made clear that life-as-lived did not satisfy the judgment of taste; it was what it was, but was not what should be[2].. We know also that the Futurists, in their rejection of the modernists, rejected this bifurcation of art and life: "art ceases to be life's affirmative 'other' and offers instead the possibility of affirming the totalizing negativity of the social machine itself" (Hewitt 137). In *both* cases the aesthetic functioned to correct or encourage social conditions; it did not exist outside of society but was always involved in a relationship with society, whether

[2] The gap between art and life was made physical by the modernist love for the museum and other bounded locations of culture; Marinetti's prposal for these locations was harsh: "we establish *Futurism* because we want to free this land from its smelly gangrene of professors, archaeologists, ciceroni, and antiquarians... set fire to the library shelves! Turn aside the canals to flood the museums!" (Marinetti 189)

that relationship was one of alterity or collusion. In some way then, both the Fascists and the anti-Fascists were engaged in producing a national aesthetics.

The nature of the *iki* body

So was Kuki's aesthetic in fact like the Fascist aesthetic which Benjamin was criticizing? The answer, to my mind, is manifestly no. I'm going to identify two ways in which it seems to me to be significantly different. First, there is the difference between the Futurist body and Kuki's *iki* body. It is striking that Kuki does not appear to have much of that vaunted Japanese love of nature — "Nature has been our constant friend and companion, who is to be absolutely trusted in spite of the frequent earthquakes assailing this land of ours" (Suzuki 334). In his chapter on "The Natural Expression of *Iki*" he gives us two extremely cursory examples of what nature has to offer in the way of *iki* — willow, light rain — and then shifts the focus to "natural form as physical expression belonging particularly to the sphere of 'primary empathy'" (Kuki 1997, 72). The natural form Kuki has in mind is the body, and particularly the body of the geisha. Now the body which expresses *iki* is not what we would ordinarily think of as natural. The body which expresses *iki* is a posed body, a designed body: "To begin with, for the whole body the *iki* expression is that which lightly disorders posture" (Kuki 1997, 73). With one exception — "it is not the tawdry gold colour of blonde hair but the lustrous green of black hair that is appropriate for the expression of *iki*" (Kuki 1997, 81) — there seems to be nothing about *iki* which is "naturally" given; *iki* has to be acquired through experience in a special setting: "*iki*, rather than being observed in young geisha, will be discovered more frequently among older geisha" (Kuki 1997, 42). So in this sense, the *iki* body is an artificial body, a body which is constructed as the Futurist body is constructed.

However, the *iki* body is unmistakably a body made of flesh, not metal; *iki* is present in the mouth, the hair, the hands (Kuki 1997, 79, 81, 83). A thoroughly natural body is not *iki*; it is *gehin*, unrefined. But equally, a thoroughly artificial body is not *iki*; it is *jōhin*, excessively refined, to the point of being vulgar. John Clark's translation allows for a bit of wordplay here: *gehin*, as a lack of refinement obviously indicates a kind of coarseness, but *johin* also indicates coarseness, the coarseness of overrefinement — *iki* is refined by unrefinement such that the "relationship of *iki* and unrefined is expressed, for example, when it is said that... they are 'chic, of good character, and not coarse at all'" (Kuki 1997, 52). And so the posing of the body is *iki* when it only half-conceals the natural posture — the posture is lightly disordered such that it refers to the natural posture: *iki* is present when both the natural and the unnatural posture are visible in the body, "in the movement where the central perpendicularity of the body changes into a curve" (Kuki 1997, 73). In exactly the same way, the body should be covered in a way that only half-conceals it: "Further expression of *iki* can be seen when the whole body is wrapped in thin, semi-transparent, silk" (Kuki 1997, 73). Kuki is directing our attention to the difference between the Edo style of Tokugawa-era Japan and the flapper style of 1920s Europe, with its fashion that "has both shortened the hem almost to the knee and donned flesh-coloured stockings to induce hallucinatory effects" (Kuki 1997, 82). His disapproval of the latter makes him sound prudish and the topic doubtless seems trifling, but in fact there is something important going on here. A silk wrapping is meant to gesture toward the body underneath, so that the possibility of the body as present is created by making the body absent; there is, in the Japanese fashion, a concealment that reveals the body as a hidden thing, that which is beneath the surface. Flesh-coloured stockings, on the other

hand, are meant to fully conceal the flesh underneath; natural skin is covered, for the sake of propriety, by artificial skin. And yet it is desirable for the artificial skin to replicate as closely as possible what it is hiding, so that what is on the surface mimics what is underneath. This is the hallucinatory effect Kuki describes; we are tricked into thinking we can see the real thing, the true thing, but the trickery itself prevents the presencing of the real.

This eccentricity of Western fashion seems to have suggested to Kuki that Westerners were fixated on the reality of the flesh — "Western-style coquetry... wiggles the hips around and performs in lewd reality" (Kuki 1997, 73). The West, on Kuki's view, perceived the body as matter and equated eros with sex; if the West had not developed its own version of *iki*, he suggests, it was because "in Western culture under the influence of Christianity which had arbitrarily cast a spell on all flesh, sexual relations outside normal intercourse joined hands with materialism and soon descended into Hell" (Kuki 1997, 120). Kuki wants to valorize the flesh, preserve it from materialism and avoid the substitution of machine-made skin for the real thing. Marinetti praised the Japanese for reducing the body to its saleable parts, making it into material — "the plainest, the most violent of Futurist symbols comes to us from the Far East. In Japan they carry on the strangest of trades: the sale of coal made from human bones... One hundred *tsin* of human bones brings in 92 kopeks" (Marinetti cited in Hewitt 82) — but this would have been thoroughly objectionable to Kuki. For him, flesh made over by *iki* was not mere matter but the instrument of an *idea* — "One can judge the soul itself through the reverberations which echo to the tips of the fingers. The very possibility of hands becoming the expression of *iki* virtually depends on this point" (Kuki 1997, 83).

So the body Kuki dreams of is a constructed body, yes, but nonetheless a body of flesh and blood, and he rejects the notion that flesh and blood is mere matter. Marinetti proposed that, burned away for the sake of the market, the body would leave behind only "an inert mass of money" (Hewitt 158); Kuki seems to have believed in a soul. He does not, however, straightforwardly privilege the body as *hors de commerce*.. I will contend that in fact his aesthetic theory does function as a rejection of the commodification of the body and, consequently, the beautiful, but he goes about this in a way which I'm not sure we've seen before. One standard manoeuvre for aesthetic theorists who wanted to privilege the beautiful was to make use of Theodore Jouffroy's notion of nonappropriation. Joseph Haven sketches out like so:

> That only is useful which can be *appropriated*, and turned to account. But the beautiful, in its very nature, cannot be appropriated or possessed. You may appropriate the picture, the statue, the mountain, the waterfall, but not their beauty. These do not belong to you, and never can. They are the property of every beholder. (Haven 278)

Haven's *Mental Philosophy* was translated into Japanese by Nishi Amane, who we might suggest invented the category of Japanese aesthetics when he coined the word *bimyōgaku* (Marra 1999, 26). Nishi takes up the notion of nonappropriation as well, although he reverses Haven's formula — for Nishi, the beautiful is that which is the property of no beholder:

> being different from moral feelings, [aesthetic feelings] are located outside the boundary of property rights...if one looks at somebody's garden or collection of calligraphy and paintings and regards them as interesting, the owner is not distressed by the fear that the observer might want them...aesthetic feelings do not impose themselves on the will at all. (cited in Marra 36)

Here the beautiful is protected from the commodifying gaze either because we can't buy it or we don't want to buy it; it exists somewhere outside of the marketplace. But Kuki locates the beautiful inside the marketplace; he locates it in the floating world, precisely the

place where what is offered for sale is beauty; and he locates it above all else in the geisha and the prostitute, figures in whom the notions of buying beauty and buying a body are collapsed. What does this mean? It means that we do want to buy beauty; we do want to appropriate it for ourselves, we do want to make it our property. And it means that we can buy beauty; beauty makes itself available to us for sale. But, and this seems to me to be Kuki's point, despite the fact that we want it and despite the fact that we can grasp it, we should restrain ourselves. It is conventional to pine away for something you can't have; it is *iki* to pine away for something you could have but will not take. The possibility of consummation exists, but *iki* consists in "the preservation of its possibility as possibility" (Kuki 1997, 39).

Kuki tells us that "Where the tensions are lost when different sexes achieve complete union, coquetry will be extinguished of its own accord. Coquetry has made the conquest of the different sex its hypothetical purpose and this has the fate of extinction when that purpose is actualized" (Kuki 1997, 38). This means that instead of action, *iki* valorizes inclination, "something which vaguely suggests a tendency towards the different sex" (Kuki 1997, 73). This plays out in a physical way, as the *iki* body is one that is caught at the moment of inclining towards another, different body. But it also plays out in a metaphysical way, arresting the basic movement of the marketplace, which is to take hold of the attractive object and consume it: "The essence of coquetry is that whilst approaching as far as distance allows the difference in distance does not reach extreme limits" (Kuki 1997, 39). The suggestion of some connection between consummation and consumption is present in English too, where the meanings of consummate and consume have been conflated so that "the senses of the two verbs came also into contact in the notion 'finish,

constructively or destructively'" (OED 1989). *Iki* flourishes when the desire to consume is not allowed to complete itself in "self-extinction" (Kuki 1997, 38).

This has the effect of halting the machinery of the commodity-form and inverting the meaning of money. In a modern capitalist system, money is linked with work, with the production of value – the more money you have, the more value you have produced, and the more value you can appropriate for yourself. This is the meaning of success. But because *iki* arises when the aggressive drive of the market is stalled, it becomes necessary to be able to deal with money (the currency of *iki*) without *buying anything*. That is to say, the *iki* person has to be able to play with money, to let it go and let it come without any interest in the value produced or appropriated. So for the *tsū*, the gentleman who has money, "The frame of mind where the 'warrior is self-composed even when starving' eventually became the Edo-ite's pride in 'not keeping money to tide over to the next day'" (Kuki 1997, 41)[3]; for the *geisha*, the woman who is money, "'Gold and silver are despicable, so she does not touch them, she never knows the price of anything, she never voices complaints'" (Kuki 1997, 41). This is how Kuki's aesthetic resists the commodification of the body: it makes a virtue out of the ability to subvert the aim of the marketplace; style here is the capacity to be in the marketplace as a player instead of a worker, to refuse the telos of the marketplace.

A typical European modernist aesthetic sets aesthetics outside of the market; it seeks to preserve beauty by isolating it from commodification, but leaves itself vulnerable to charges that it enables the consumption of the human being by allowing the state to do what it likes in the world of money and markets while identifying itself with some higher realm

[3] Santō Kyōden identifies this ease in regards to money as one of the five characteristics of the *tsū*: "He is not attached to money; he is not stingy. His funds do not cover the night's lodging" (cited in Nishiyama 42).

of imagination. Marinetti's Fascist aesthetic sets aesthetics inside the market and valorizes capitalism's project of self-destruction (Hewitt 244); it identifies the market as functioning out of two primal forces, destruction and libido (Marcuse 257, 1969) and places itself on the side of destruction. Kuki's aesthetic of *iki* is like Marinetti's insofar as it sets aesthetics inside the market, but profoundly unlike Marinetti's in that it constitutes a rejection of self-destruction. Modernist aesthetics are ateleological, or antiteleological, in that they link telos with usefulness, and link beauty with aimless play. Marinetti's aesthetic is fundamentally teleological, with its telos being the triumph of the commodity form. *Iki*, despite being associated with the aimless play of *asobi*, is not ateleological or antiteleological. Rather, if I can coin an awkward word, it is proxiteleological: it is the practice of bringing oneself as near as possible to the other, the aim of the heart, without collapsing into that other. As we will see in the third chapter, it's my belief that in developing this proxiteleology, Kuki was making use of certain ideas that had currency at the time, ideas received from Japanese Buddhism. First though, I want to deal with that element of European thought that most closely approximates a proxiteleological position: absurdism.

CHAPTER TWO — ABSURDITY

The other element of Kuki's genealogy that is isolated by his Western critics is French: Bergson, Baudelaire, and Barbey d'Aurevilly. This is a lineage that is much less politically damning than the German, and much more explicitly appropriated in Kuki's own work. Kuki himself expressed a clear affinity for French culture, and suggested in one of his *propos* that a special degree of analogical similarity existed between Japanese and French philosophy: "Buddhism teaches the eternal flow of things, often employing the image of flowing water. And Bergsonian philosophy is recognized as the philosophy of the *durée*, sometimes expressed in just this image of 'flowing water'" (Kuki in Light 97). One of Kuki's most sympathetic Western critics, Thorsten Botz-Bornstein, treats Kuki as developing Bergson's thought by mediating it with Zen. Another way of approaching this of course is simply to say that Kuki plagiarized the French just as he plagiarized the Germans. In this chapter, I'll do three things: examine the traces of Baudelaire in Kuki's aesthetics, suggest that Kuki's work precedes certain key developments in French absurdist existentialism, and argue that Kuki's proxiteleological version of absurdity in fact diverges in significant ways from the continental version.

Kuki in France

Kuki spent almost three years in France during his time in Europe; he was, by several accounts, fluent in both the French language and French mores (Light; Zavala in Dilworth and Viglielmo). And yet there is a small but to my mind significant tendency among Western commentators to present Kuki-in-France as something of a naïf. In his foreword to Stephen Light's *Shūzō Kuki and Jean-Paul Sartre*, Sartre scholar Michel Rybalka notes that Kuki refers to Sartre in his journals as "Monsieur" and comments, "the apparent respect with which Kuki treated 'Monsieur Sartre' [was] probably not conducive

to an open exchange of ideas" (Rybalka in Light x). At the time of his meetings with Sartre, Kuki was forty years old, and had arrived in Paris after having spent time studying in Germany under Rickert and Husserl. Sartre was twenty-three years old, and had just been failed in his first attempt at the examinations for the *agrégation de philosophie*.. It seems to me unlikely that Kuki would have been so intimidated by Sartre that he became tongue-tied at their meetings. Less personal, but in my opinion more egregious, is Steven Heine's declaration that Kuki's development of *iki* as a disclosing of "the priority of existence over essence" is Sartre's influence at work (Heine 70). Not only does Heine in fact attribute every single element of Kuki's work on *iki* to a Western philosopher, he doesn't even bother to check his dates on this point. *'Iki' no kōzō* was published in 1930, eight years before Sartre published *Nausea* and thirteen years before he fully articulated his understanding of existentialism in *Being and Nothingness*. There is no obvious reason to suppose that Kuki has taken anything from Sartre.

Heine's apparently unfounded presumption that Kuki comes at his existentialism by way of Sartre is consistent, obviously, with the Western approach of identifying Japanese philosophy as inevitably borrowed from continental philosophy. In this instance, the claim rests on the unproven and uninterrogated proposition that the existentialism we associate with Sartre and Camus either predates similar Japanese developments or flourished without Japanese influence. Leslie Pincus says this of Kuki's "The Notion of Time and Repetition in Oriental Time": playing "a game of existentialist one-upmanship in the arenas of national cultures... in an essay extolling the virtues of *bushidō*, Kuki intimated that Japan was a more than worthy inheritor of a heroicized legacy of Sisyphus and the moral philosophy of Kant" (Pincus 1996, 190). The question that is not asked here, it

seems to me, is from whom exactly Japan is supposed to be inheriting this heroicized legacy of Sisyphus.

Kuki concluded "The Notion of Time and Repetition in Oriental Time," the first of his two lectures at the 1928 Pontigny *décade*, with this discussion of Sisyphus:

> It has always seemed to me superficial that the Greeks saw damnation in the myth of Sispyhus. He rolled a rock almost to the summit, and the rock rolled back down. He began again, and again, forever. Is there unhappiness here, is there punishment in this task? I don't understand it so. I don't believe so. Everything depends upon the subjective attitude of Sisyphus. His good will, his strong and sure will, in renewing his efforts always, in rolling his rock always, finds in this repetition all his moral direction, and consequently all his happiness. Sisyphus must be happy, being capable of a perpetually unsatisfied repetition. This is a man driven by moral feeling. He is not in hell, he is in heaven. Everything depends upon the subjective point of view of Sisyphus. (Kuki in Light, 26)

Albert Camus began producing his famous *Myth of Sisyphus* in the late 1930s, as part of a book which would be published by Gallimard in 1942. Camus says in the preface to the first English translation of *Le Mythe du Sisyphe* that he wrote it "in 1940, amid the French and European disaster" (Camus 1955, v) but he begins working on an essay on the absurd as early as 1937 (Olivier 95), and in a February 1939 letter to his teacher Jean Grenier is still referring to it only as "mon essai sur l'Absurde" (Camus 1981, 34). What might have happened in 1940 was that Camus hit upon the idea of discussing absurdity with reference to Sisyphus: "It was only in the last months of his writing his essay on the absurd that Camus decided to call it *Le Mythe du Sisyphe/The Myth of Sisyphus*, thereby giving to the entire work the title of its final chapter" (Raskin 156). The publication of *Le Mythe du Sisyphe* established Camus as an important inheritor of Nietzschean existentialism, and would propel him into the role of progenitor of the theatre of the absurd.

The similarities between these two rewritings have not been much remarked upon. Agustin Zavala does not mention them in his introduction to Kuki's work in the

Sourcebook for Modern Japanese Philosophy, nor does Stephen Light, though he reproduces Kuki's "The Notion of Time" in full in his *Shūzō Kuki and Jean-Paul Sartre*. In his review of *Shūzō Kuki*, Joseph Fell observes that Kuki's version of Sisyphus anticipates Camus's (Fell 325), and in an essay on Iimura Takahiko, Daniel Charles comments "This admirable text should merit a little more celebrity: in effect it traces in letters of fire the veritable way of Sisyphus... Albert Camus had transferred Kuki in rewriting, ten years later, the coda of his essay on *The Myth of Sisyphus*: well no Japanese, to my knowledge, has noticed!" (Charles).

There is some evidence which suggests that the circumstances existed for Camus to have encountered Kuki's work, and his biographer notes that, as a young writer at least, Camus was not averse to borrowing ideas (Olivier 20). Kuki's essay was available to Camus certainly — it was written in French and had been published, as we've noted, twelve years prior to Camus beginning his work on Sisyphus. The two papers presented at the Pontigny *décade*[4] — "The Notion of Time" and "The Expression of the Infinite" — were included in the collection *Propos sur le temps*, issued in 1928 by Philippe Renouard, and were republished in 1929 in *Correspondance de l'Union pour la vérité*. In 1940, Camus was still friendly with Kuki's former French tutor, Jean-Paul Sartre, and the possibility that Asia might have a special contribution to make to the problem of absurdity was already present for French thinkers — in his notes for Camus on *Sisyphe*, Grenier tells him that "the fact that life is absurd does not lead inexorably to suicide; this way of thinking can also to happiness. Look at the Buddhists" (Camus 1981, 6). None of this of

[4] In a quirk of intellectual history, French writer André Malraux was at Pontigny for the *décade* in 1928, and was one of the first readers of Camus's *Sisyphe*, although I have found no indication that he commented on the similarity.

course constitutes proof that Camus had come across Kuki's Sisyphus, and certainly both would have read Nietzsche's *Will to Power* and so been exposed to his doctrine of eternal recurrence, which is usually recognized as one of Camus's key influences. Nonetheless I think we can say two things affirmatively: first that the punchline to both versions is the same — Kuki's Sisyphus who "must be happy, capable of a perpetually unsatisfied repetition" (Kuki in Light, 49)[5] is exactly like Camus's, who "concludes that all is well...The struggle itself toward the heights is enough to fill a man's heart. One must imagine Sisyphus happy" (Camus 1955, 91)[6] — and second that Kuki's Sispyhus preceded Camus's by at least ten years, and so has to stand, it seems to me, as invented rather than inherited.

There is also, however, an interesting difference between Camus and Kuki on this point. For Camus, happiness or despair is the product of Sisyphus's choice to claim his fate as his own: "It makes of fate a human matter, which must be settled among men. All Sisyphus' silent joy is contained therein. His fate belongs to him. His rock is his thing" (Camus 1955, 91).. For Kuki, Sisyphus's happiness is in some sense thrust upon him — he is "compelled to happiness" (Kuki in Light, 49). His happiness comes not out of a settling of his fate, making it his own, but out of the possibility of repetition; he is happy because he is able to "renew his efforts always." I'll try to put it more clearly: Camus imagines Sisyphus happy when he makes the decisive choice that turns the rock from punishment to fate. Kuki imagines Sisyphus happy when the rock rolls back down the hill, allowing him

[5] "Sisyphe devrait être heureux" (Kuki 1928, 166).

[6] "Il faut imaginer Sisyphe heureux" (Camus 1967, 26).

to make a choice over and over again. It is in this split that we see most plainly the different uses to which Camus and Kuki have put Baudelaire's dandy aesthetics.

Baudelaire's dandy

It is plain that Kuki was a fan of Baudelaire's: he characterizes him as the embodiment of "sensual pleasure animated by a noble spirit" (Kuki in Light 88), and says in *'Iki' no kōzō* that "*Les fleurs du mal* often expresses a passion close to *iki*" (Kuki 1997, 119). It is also plain that Baudelaire's thought influenced Kuki's aesthetics: the understanding of art Kuki develops in "The Notion of Time" has a clear resonance with the one laid out in "The Painter of Modern Life." For Baudelaire, the goal of the artist was "to pull the eternal out from the transient... Modernity is the transitory, the momentary, the contingent, the half of art whose other half is the eternal and the unchanging" (Baudelaire 1922, 66). Kuki characterizes the technique of Japanese painting as a manifestation of "its essential preoccupations... to aid the finite in the expression of the infinite" (Kuki in Light 52). It is because of Baudelaire that Kuki, before anyone else, would turn his gaze to the Edo floating world: "Kuki Shūzō's *Structure of Iki*, for example, is perhaps the first attempt to give a philosophical meaning to the sensibilities and lifestyle of the Japanese living during the late Edo period" (Karatani in Marra 1999, 270-271). Baudelaire tells us that dandyism flashes into being "above all in those transient periods where democracy is not yet all-powerful, and where the aristocracy is only partially weakened, partially debased... the last burst of heroism in a decaying age... Dandyism is a setting sun; like a dying star, magnificent, without heat and full of melancholy" (Baudelaire 1922, 91). Kuki cites this very passage in *'Iki' no kōzō* when he tells us that dandyism may be understood as analogous to *iki* (Kuki 1997, 119); he characterizes the Edo-ite as having "a heart which

tinges towards the black" and identifies as *iki* "green, azure, and violet... colours which remain visible in the soul's twilight" (Kuki 1997, 99). From both Kuki and Baudelaire, there is the suggestion that the style they find most attractive is made attractive by its fleeting quality; it is the job of style to attempt the impossible task of fixing the beauty of the contingent. This is why for both Kuki and Baudelaire, the world that was most likely to produce style was the half-world, the *démimonde*, which itself existed not as a real place but as an in-between place, a liminal space in which pre-modernity dissolved into modernity, and so where both were paradoxically momentarily present. The attraction to the in-between space held too for the in-between time, so that style flashed into being for Baudelaire during that time in between historical periods, and so in some sense outside of historical periods — both contingent and eternal — and for Kuki likewise, during the time in between day and night.

This interest in the in-between time is often misread, in my opinion, as a simple anti-modernism. Even as kind a reader as Thorsten Botz-Bornstein characterizes dandyism, and *iki*, as basically a return to pre-modernity, a mode in which "morality and aesthetics have fused, leaving no possibility of distinguishing one from the other" (Botz-Bornstein 1997b, 557). This is not quite right. The liminal position of the dandy, set against *both* the old and the new, exists only so long as both exist, so long as neither democracy nor aristocracy prevails. This means that the relationship of the dandy to the modern is a complicated one rather than one of simple resistance. The luddite resists modernity wholeheartedly; the dandy is produced by modernity and so affirms it even in assuming a pose against it. This is why Baudelaire's perfect dandy takes "immense joy" in situating himself on the street in the midst of the bourgeois marketplace where he can be

seen as original (Baudelaire in Cahoone 140); he makes a spectacle of himself in the crowd because it is only by way of contrast that he comes into focus as a private man. Dandyism appears in the wake of modernity, and functions as an aesthetic rejection of bourgeois morality. The dandy does not blend aesthetics and morality; he makes bank on the modern inversion of the relationship between the beautiful and the good. It is because he is so immersed in the aesthetic, which as we've noted in the first chapter stands in for religion in the modern's life, that his aestheticism can look like religion, making "*revelation* out of *profanation*" (DeGuy 188): Baudelaire, the "dandy Lucifer" declares himself that he does not consider at all wrong to treat dandyism "as a kind of religion. The most rigorous monastic law... is not more despotic nor more faithfully obeyed than this doctrine of elegance and originality" (Emmanuel 106; Baudelaire 1922, 90)

But there is no space for public morals in Baudelaire's aesthetics; the aesthetics are not themselves a morality, they are an anti-morality, and this is why they require an outside, an other. The dandy's transformation of the sinner into the saint only functions in opposition to some middle-class other with a conventional morality that can establish the limits of sin. The dandy mimics the religious mode while rejecting conventional religious morality: "in certain places, dandyism borders on spirituality and stoicism. But a dandy can never be a vulgar man" (Baudelaire 1922, 89).

In certain ways, dandyism worked against modern systems of production and consumption. The value placed on succeeding at doing and making by the merchant class was overturned by the dandy, who produced nothing, held no position and created no art other than the oeuvre of his own life. The dandy rejected the speed of modernity, choosing to dawdle, to *flâner*. But Baudelaire's "perfect *flâneur*" did not flee the crowd; his

perfection was marked by his ability to establish himself as an outsider while remaining on the inside, literally, with the world rushing around him: for the dandy, he said, "it is an immense joy to take up residence in the crowd, in the undulating wave of movement, in the fleeting and the infinite. To be far from home, and all the same to feel everywhere is home; to see the world, to be at the centre of the world, and in this centre to stay hidden from the world" (Baudelaire 1922, 62). The dandy did not, however, reject consumption. Obviously a certain degree of excess is necessary in outfitting the dandy, and part of dandyism was the capacity to incur tremendous amounts of debt, but this is not the real object of the dandy's grasp (Baudelaire 1922, 89). What the dandy seeks to consume is everything outside of himself; he is, according to Baudelaire, "an 'I' with an insatiable appetite for the 'non-I'" (Baudelaire in Cahoone 140). This effort to bring everything into the realm of the self is part of the dandy's absolute disinterest in anything not belonging to him — his drive is towards self-sufficiency. This means that wherever he looks, he sees himself: directing his gaze outwards, he finds only his double, the "hypocrite lecteur, mon semblable, mon frère" (Baudelaire 1991, 56).

Camus's dandy hero

Camus, like Baudelaire and Kuki, was interested in the figure of the professional flirt; in *The Myth of Sisyphus*, he identifies Don Juan as one of his absurd heroes. Like Kuki's geisha, whose heart does not "believe in the objective of which it is so easily cheated" (Kuki 1997, 42), Camus tells us that "Don Juan knows and does not hope. He reminds one of those artists who know their limits and never go beyond them, and in that precarious interval in which they take their spiritual stand enjoy all the wonderful ease of masters. And that indeed is genius: the intelligence that knows its frontiers" (Camus 1955,

52). Like Kuki's "People who live for *iki*... in the thin air of *amour-goût* by picking bracken" (Kuki 1997, 45), Camus's heroes live "in the rarefied air of the absurd... it is a question of breathing with it, of recognizing its lessons and recovering their flesh" (Camus 1955, 69). And like Kuki, who is preoccupied with images of restraint, tension, feelings and bodies held in check — "Know thou the limits of thy station" (Kuki 1997, 53) — Camus insists that the absurd functions to restrict:

> The absurd does not liberate, it binds. It does not authorize all actions. 'Everything is permitted' does not mean nothing is forbidden. The absurd merely confers an equivalence on the consequences of those actions. It does not recommend crime, for this would be childish, but it restores to remorse its futility. Likewise, if all experiences are indifferent, that of duty is as legitimate as any other. One can be virtuous through a whim. (Camus 1955, 50)

This binding, however, does not put the absurd person in tension with another person; instead, as I understand it, only the self is held to be ontically real — other people are, for Camus, manifestations of the nothingness out of which the self is projected. This I think is why Camus's Don Juan is possessed of the same appetite that possesses Baudelaire's dandy: although Camus identifies three directions for absurd action — Don Juanism, drama, and conquest — the difference between Don Juan and Camus's conqueror rests only in the object toward which they orient themselves. "Conquerors know," Camus says, "that action in itself is useless. There is but one useful action, that of remaking man and the earth" (Camus 1955, 64); what this means is bringing the earth into the realm of the self, establishing it as one's own ground, so that the "vanquishing and overcoming" of the other is transformed into "overcoming oneself" (Camus 1955, 65).

Don Juan too is a vanquisher and an overcomer, and the object he conquers is woman: "Don Juan does not think of 'collecting' women. He exhausts their number and with them his chances of life" (Camus 1955, 54) — here the consumption of the other is

transformed into the consumption of the self. Camus imagines his Don Juan as a Sisyphus — "A fate is not a punishment" (Camus 1955, 55) — but he betrays this vision with his insistence that what drives Don Juan is the promise of the new. There is in Camus a promise of satisfaction: "As for satiety, Don Juan insists upon it... If he leaves a woman it is not absolutely because he has ceased to desire her. A beautiful woman is always desirable. But he desires another, and no, this is not the same thing. This life gratifies his every wish" (Camus 1955, 52-53). The women here are dupes, they are lightly discarded — "each woman hopes to give him what no one has ever given him. Each time they are utterly wrong and merely manage to make him feel the need of that repetition" (Camus 1955, 51). Camus's Don Juan is a dandy in his relentless drive to establish himself as a genius, as the master of his own fate, as having the capacity to transform into art ordinary seduction, "his condition in life" (Camus 1955, 53). And he is a dandy in his endless consumption, his "ethic of quantity", his reversal of the relationship between the self and time — "Time" says Camus, "keeps up with him" (Camus 1955, 54). He is also, this Don Juan, incapable of loving another person for her being.

Jean Onimus points out the strange ambivalence in Camus's treatment of love: "Camus eulogizes, though not without a basic sadness, ephemeral love. But how can the absurd man take love seriously without belying himself; would not fidelity to the 'truth' of love oblige him to remain unfaithful? For love, like everything else, cannot have any depth" (Onimus 75). Camus himself asks of Don Juan's absurd love, "Is he selfish for all that?" and answers, "In his way, probably" (Camus 1955, 54). It is like this because as Camus understands it, there is no relationship with the other in absurd love. The ordinary person — the woman — loves another person, exclusively: "A mother or a passionate wife

necessarily has a closed heart, for it is turned away from the world" (Camus 1955, 54). The absurd person — Don Juan — loves differently; his relationship is with God, or, given the death of God, with nihility, "kneeling before a void" (Camus 1955, 57).

This vaulting above the realm of human relationships into a direct relationship with God-as-nothingness is Camus's existential refinement of Kierkegaard's absurdity. Kierkegaard understands the movement of the absurd as a movement from universal ethics to individual faith; he discusses it in *Fear and Trembling* in terms of Abraham's resignation to the will of God, and his absurd faith that, despite the fact that he has been called to make this sacrifice (though "he would prefer not to" (Derrida 75)) and has agreed to make it, Isaac will nonetheless be spared, or as Derrida puts it, given again. For the French existentialists who follow Kierkegaard, this movement from universal to individual is retained in the absence of God, so that the individual first faces the call to Mount Moriah as the non-being of the self and then, in an absurd movement, receives the self back again affirmatively as a projection of nihility. Kuki starts working on absurdity before Sartre or Camus, and he comes up with something different.

Kuki's dandy hero

In his Paris work, Kuki does posit the kind of dialectical overcoming that figures in both Kierkegaard and Camus's understandings of absurdity, and he does see the result of this dialectic as a conqueror figure who has surpassed the realm of universals. At this point in his career, Kuki was privileging the samurai, and in so doing, privileging Shinto, which he associated with the samurai's particular Sisyphean capacity to transform "misfortune into happiness" (Kuki in Light 50). In order to understand Kuki's samurai Don Juan however, we have to understand Kuki's Catholicism.

Kuki was baptized at the age of twenty-three, under the name Franciscus Assisiensis. The fact of his Catholicism is not, to my knowledge, taken up by any of his Western critics other than as evidence of Kuki's inclination toward the West — in the *Sourcebook for Modern Japanese Philosophy* we are told that, of the major Kyoto School scholars, Kuki not only "had the longest stay in the West" but was "the only one of the seven to become a Christian" (Dilworth and Viglielmo xiii). The *Sourcebook* suggests, or so it seems to me, that Kuki's conversion should be understood as a basically aesthetic gesture: "Kuki prized individuality, and this was also manifested in his becoming a Catholic in 1911" (Dilworth and Viglielmo 193). With the scant evidence available, we might tentatively characterize Kuki's faith as eccentric. We have already encountered his critique of Christian attitudes towards the body in *'Iki' no kōzō*. In "Subject and Graft," one of the short *propos* he produced during his time in Paris, he suggests that Christianity will be most amenable to the Japanese spirit if Jesus is understood as a kind of samurai, "a man who urges us to follow upon a path not so very different from our *Bushidō*" (Kuki in Light 86); in "The Expression of the Infinite in Japanese Art," he tells the reader "I do not believe in Buddhist transmigration any more than I believe in life after death in the Christian sense. I only wish to affirm the possibility of conceiving of transmigration. There is neither more nor less of the imaginary in the concept of transmigration than in that of the Christian future life" (Kuki in Light 206). So we appear to have here a Catholic who has some kind of imaginative relationship with Jesus while rejecting the notion of life after death — insofar as Kuki does away with the possibility of either reward for virtue or punishment for sin, this amounts to effectively rejecting a belief in sin as a problem.. Kuki's is thus a faith entirely unmoored from the system of judgment and salvation that

seems to me to form the ground of Christian ethics. What attracts him in the Christ narrative then is the death rather than the resurrection, and this is why he can imagine Jesus as a samurai. The samurai's life is not his own, and yet he carries on and this is what constitutes his freedom: "He plunges recklessly towards an irrational death. By doing this, you will awaken from your dreams" (Yamamoto 10). If Kuki believed in life after death, he could believe in the resurrection; he could believe that Christ's death was purposeful. Because he doesn't believe in life after death, and can't believe in the resurrection, he sees Christ's death as irrational — Jesus is heroic in his willingness to shoulder the absurdity of his fate.

Kuki was not alone among Japanese Christians in imagining Christianity as sympathetic to *bushidō*.. Christianity found its Japanese converts in the children of the shogun (Karatani 1993), those should-have-been samurai who could find no place in the market-driven culture of the Meiji — "the young men who professed the new religion and resolved to take on the whole world for it were without exception those who were not advancing on the currents of time. They had no hopes of sating themselves with prestige. Their expectations of attaining status in the real world were minimal" (Aizan cited in Karatani 1993, 84). So the concern with *bushidō* as central to some essential form of Japaneseness, as the "'religion' of Japan" (Nukariya Kaiten cited in Hurst 513), was being tended to by those Japanese who found themselves most at odds with Japan as it actually was — they were, in one way or another, at the margins. Nitobe Inazō, the author of *Bushido: The Soul of Japan*, and the figure who Karatani identifies as the first to imagine a link between the samurai and Christianity (Karatani 1993, 84), was "isolated spatially, culturally, religiously, and even linguistically from the currents of Meiji Japan. In the

words of one observer... 'the most de-orientalized Japanese I have ever met'" (Hurst 512). Kuki was very much like Nitobe in some respects: he was in some ways isolated both from the popular and academic cultures he had access to, and the world he felt at home in was, by the time of his writing, a fading memory, more like a national fiction than a fact (Kelly in McClain 327). However, where the basic direction of Kuki's work was inwards, the basic direction of Nitobe's work was outwards; he wrote *Bushido* in English, and his intention in writing it was to demonstrate that Japan had a way of the warrior that was the equal of its Western counterpart — "what he tried to do in his work was suggest that medieval European chivalry and Japanese *bushidō* were not so different after all. Thus Nitobe's cluster of ethical principles is inclusive enough to be almost universal" (Hurst 516). He was interested in constructing a Japanese culture that the West would take seriously.

Nitobe identifies the willingness to sacrifice one's own life for something greater as one of the first principles of *bushidō*: "whenever a cause presented itself which was considered dearer than life, with utmost sincerity and celerity was life laid down" (Nitobe 50). Kuki, on the other hand, insists that his samurai be reckless and irrational; his version of *bushidō* resonates with a passage from the *Hagakure* which tells us that "Among the maxims on Lord Naoshige's wall there was this one: 'Matters of great concern should be treated lightly.' Master Ittei commented, 'Matters of small concern should be treated seriously'" (Yamamoto 8). Kuki's firm rejection of seriousness in favour of lightness upsets Nitobe's understanding of *bushidō*, suggesting that the true samurai will be ready to lay his life down not because the cause is dearer than life but despite the fact that the cause has no value. In choosing to champion the trivial rather than the weighty, Kuki effectively

positions himself against the Meiji samurai "whose raison d'etre was to suffer for the sake of others" (Okakura 146). Kuki's samurai has no reason for being, and so simply is, without reason. This turn to irrationality was paired with a turn inward; even in the work written for a French audience, we see Kuki beginning to develop the claim that there are radical differences between cultures, so that the claim to universal values of chivalry falls away.

Rather than identifying *bushidō* with Christianity then, Kuki identifies it with Shinto, which in the Paris work represents whatever is internal to Japan. Shinto is not, however, paired against Christianity in a simple binary of Orient and Occident; instead, it is paired against Buddhism: "in us there are two predominant currents of thought: Shintoist thought in the form of *bushidō*, and Buddhist thought in the form of Zen" (Kuki in Light 73). This pairing of *bushidō* and Zen has fixed onto it a series of associated oppositions — *bushidō*, in its relation to Shinto, was indigenously Japanese, Zen was the religion "of Indian inspiration" (Kuki in Light 49); *bushidō* accounted for the Japanese affinity with Kant, Zen for the Japanese inclination to Bergson (Kuki in Light 73); *bushidō* concerned itself with "happiness", Zen with "escape from misfortune" (Kuki in Light 50). And where Zen sought to escape from time into *nirvana*, and in so doing escape from "the supreme evil" of the will (Kuki in Light 49), *bushidō* embraced time — "There is surely nothing other than the single purpose of the present moment. A man's whole life is a succession of moment after moment" (Yamamoto 27). *Bushidō*, in its affirmation of the will, offered "the negation of the negation, in a sense the abolition of *nirvana*... in order to live, truly live, in the indefinite repetition of the arduous search for the true, the good, the beautiful" (Kuki in Light 72). Through its association with Shinto, this indefinite repetition stands,

for Kuki, as organically Japanese; it is this will to indefinite repetition that in fact brings Japan as a (metropolitan) location into being —

> We commenced construction of the Tokyo subway just after the great earthquake which five years ago destroyed almost half of Tokyo. At that time I was in Europe. People asked me: "Why do you build a subway destined to be destroyed by one of these earthquakes you perpetually have every hundred years?" I answered: "It is the enterprise itself which interests us, not the goal. We are going to construct it anew. A new earthquake will destroy it once again. Ah well, we will always recommence. It is the will itself we esteem, will to its own perfection." (Kuki in Light 49-50)

This is Kuki's proof that the Japanese, having internalized Shinto's *bushidō* directive to live through repetition, will not see the story of Sisyphus as a story of damnation; they themselves are Sisyphus, and Japan as manifest in the metropolitan location of Tokyo, is in some sense the performance of their punishment. The idea here that the attempt to generate a stable, permanent Japan is fruitless — that Japaneseness itself rests in the impossibility of this task — flies in the face of the Meiji insistence on the seriousness, the enduring quality, of the Japanese spirit.

In his 1903 *Ideals of the East*, another Meiji book on Japaneseness written for an English audience, Okakura Kakuzō criticizes the very pieces Kuki would choose to celebrate: "Great art is that before which we long to die. But the art of the late Tokugawa period only allowed a man to dwell in the delights of fancy. It is because the prettiness of the works of this period first came to notice... that Japanese art is not yet seriously considered in the West" (Okakura 186). Kuki, I think, took up Okakura's interest in surface, in "incidental appearances" as that beneath which "the life of the universe beats" (Okakura 165) but by focusing on what Okakura derided, he sought to establish Japanese art as having its own logic, a logic of play. If Westerners were interested in work — and look how in the West even art is described in terms of work and its attendant notion of

value — the Japanese would be reimagined as interested in play, in fancy, in the inward and the imperfect: "here is the beautiful monster! here is the beautiful demon!" (Kuki in Light 54).

This privileging of the inner world will be more fully developed in *'Iki' no kōzō* where it will become a central element of Kuki's politics, as I'll argue in the final chapter, but it also reflects a shift in the balance between contingent and eternal in Kuki's aesthetics. The samurai does represent an overcoming for Kuki, as Shinto-*bushidō* is the "negation of negation" (Kuki in Light 50), but he does not positively affirm his own existence, as Camus's Don Juan and Sisyphus, and Kierkegaard's Abraham do, even in silence. There is a leap above the level of universals into the level of the particular, but this negation of the negation is not an affirmation; it is still not possible to speak of eternity: the samurai is never given back to himself; his claim on his own life has always already been ceded. For writers like Nitobe and Okakura, the significance of *bushidō* was that it revealed the depths of an enduring, eternal, universal Japan. For Kuki, *bushidō* revealed a contingency at the depths of Japaneseness, a living as a contingent "succession of moment after moment" (Yamamoto 27). As against Camus then, Kuki's Sisyphus is indifferent to fate; the future exists only as that possibility of eternity that enlivens the contingent present by producing "finalité sans fin" (Kuki 1966, 195). In *'Iki' no kōzō*, Kuki will radically problematize even the notion of overcoming.

Kuki's dandy heroine

'Iki' no kōzō reworks the oppositional pairing of *bushidō* and Zen, transforming it into the pairing of *ikiji* (brave composure) and *akirame* (resignation), the opposing principles that govern the field of *bitai* (coquetry). *Ikiji* maintains some association with

bushidō; it is idealism which "spiritualises" *iki* just as *bushidō* was the Shinto idealist response to Zen fatalism. But Kuki shifts possession of *ikiji* away from the samurai, whose inherited morality he now criticizes as conventional, or *yashikimono* (Kuki 1997, 45 *fn*38). The masculine exemplars of *ikiji* are the *otokodate* and the *hikeshi*:

> The 'genuine' Edoite... praised the chivalry of the neighbourhood toughie [*otokodate*] with the ideal of the 'flower of Edo,' the neighbourhood fireman [*hikeshi*] who did not even consider the risk to his own life, the roofworking fireman who went without shoes and wore only white, formal inner socks and his livery coat even in the cold. (Kuki 1997, 40)

The *otokodate*, or chivalrous man, was an ordinary man who took on the role of samurai in order to protect the common people. The *hikeshi*, Edo firemen, were recruited from the lower classes, and from the ranks of the homeless, the unemployed, and convicted criminals, but were revered by the townspeople for their bravery and stylishness (Kelly in McClain 327). By relocating the samurai ethic from the hereditary samurai class to the self-selected underclass heroes of Edo, Kuki solidifies his privileging of choice over destiny, as against Camus's treatment of choice transformed into destiny — the *otokodate* and *hikeshi* are *iki* not because they have transformed themselves into samurai, who are obligated by convention to be brave and stylish, but because they are continually choosing for no reason to behave like samurai. But Kuki's concern in *'Iki' no kōzō* is really the geisha, not her masculine counterpart.

How is Kuki's geisha like Baudelaire's dandy? Like Baudelaire's perfect dandy, who can move easily between postures of refusing and succumbing, the geisha's manifestation of *iki* lies in her ability to draw near while maintaining her distance, to express "passivity in greeting and activity in approaching" (Kuki 1997, 73). This is true in a literal sense, but the tension here is also the tension between the old world and the new,

the public and the private worlds, and the exercising of will and resignation to fate. It is worth noting here that Kuki's location for perfect Japaneseness has shifted from modern Tokyo to Edo, which both was and wasn't modern, and both is and isn't Tokyo, and again that within Edo the geisha is located inside the floating world, a space which both was and wasn't the city proper. The in-betweenness of Baudelaire's dandy in time and space is mirrored in Kuki's selection of the geisha as his exemplar of *iki*.

However, Kuki's treatment of the relation between the subject and the object of desire is something quite different, and *iki* is produced in the sustaining of appetite rather than in its satisfaction. It is in this respect that his dandy is different from Baudelaire's; this difference is reflected and perhaps constituted by his shift in focus from the masculine mode to the feminine. Let me be clear: I am not suggesting that Kuki understood gender differently than did Baudelaire and Camus. I am suggesting that by putting the (basically) masculine mode of *ikiji* in tension with the (basically) feminine mode of *akirame*, instead of with God or nihility, Kuki developed an aesthetic that was meaningfully different from the dandyism of Baudelaire and Camus. Kuki himself makes the point like this: "insofar as it is something in which 'Caesar, Catalina and Alcibiades present remarkable types,' [dandyism's] semantic content is almost only appropriate to the male sex. As opposed to this, there is the specific colouring of *iki* in heroism breathing through a fragile woman" (Kuki 1997, 119)[7].

Pincus identifies this as one of "a number of arguments, none particularly persuasive" put forward by Kuki to assert his difference from the French poet to whom he deferred (Pincus 1996, 137-138). I can't engage with Pincus on this point very directly

[7] The line Kuki quotes here is from "The Painter of Modern Life": "César, Catilina, Alcibiade..." (Baudelaire 1922, 88).

because she does not offer any discussion of why exactly this gender difference argument is unpersuasive. Certainly Pincus does repeatedly note Kuki's inclination to feminize *iki*: "It is the women of the quarters... who elicit Kuki's boundless admiration... Kuki transacted his cultural critique largely on the terrain of the female body" (Pincus 1996, 130, 201). However, Pincus argues that this feminization is in itself problematic — "Though *iki* had originally been an epithet applied to both genders, Kuki's interpretation weighed heavily toward its feminine manifestations — a gender preference suggesting that Kuki himself was implicated in an exoticizing discourse on the Orient that consistently feminized its object" (Pincus 1996, 93). Pincus will later propose that we might think of Kuki's strategy as a "reverse self-exoticization" (Pincus 1996, 182 *fn*1); this position shifts the problem of Orientalism away from Kuki's Western critic onto Kuki himself.

I'm reluctant to accept what Pincus is suggesting here because her argument relies on what looks to me like a false binary. She claims that Kuki's valorizing of the geisha reflects a dislike of the *moga*, the modern girl, and she makes a strong case for this, but ends up, I think, conflating tradition, rigidity, concealment, and oppression: "the imposition of an erotic etiquette on the female body suggests Kuki's resistance to the 'modern girl' who subverted and altered traditional gender distinctions and sexual norms" (Pincus 1996, 183 *fn*1).

The problem here, it seems to me, is the failure to address the fact that the geisha *also* subverted and altered traditional gender distinctions and sexual norms. I won't argue that Kuki was a feminist thinker, but he wasn't uncomplicatedly Victorian. Pincus argues that Kuki resented the modern girl for denying him the opportunity to assert his dominance as a voyeur — "Because the modern woman displayed more of herself to full view, she

deprived Kuki of the opportunity to imagine what she concealed — whether her flesh or her soul" (Pincus 1996, 200). Pincus thus treats concealment as enforced by the male gaze and in service to the male gaze, but the free display she describes as running counter to this gaze sounds no less oppressive: citing Maeda Ai on the modern version of the feminine, Pincus tells us that "'The woman of the twenties was completely engrossed in becoming beautiful, in polishing her bare skin to a brilliant luster: Club powder, Shiseido coldcream, and the beauty secrets revealed in women's magazines... a skin without depth'" (Pincus 1996, 199-200). If the whole person is on full view here, it is because she exists only as surface, only as something to be looked at.

The geisha, on the other hand, is, as Kuki understands her, possessed of both interiority and exteriority. *Iki* itself consists in the capacity to express both interiority and exteriority; it is because of its insistence on both, I think, that Karatani is lead to claim first that the "structure of *iki*, defined by Kuki as 'Japanese spirit,' is a mode of thought which has lost all exteriority by wrapping itself in its identity," and then, a page later, that "there was only one further alternative remaining: to push further the idea that all is language, an idea leading to a world of pure surface, one devoid of all meaning and interiority. The structure of *iki* enters into this category" (Karatani 1989, 269, 270). We can go along with whatever claims Karatani makes about the production of interiority as a basically modern inversion and still, I think, conclude that in *iki* neither interiority nor exteriority prevails:

> Showy is the leaf going outwards... Subdued is the root tasting the earth... The first is a mode of being which goes from self to other, the latter a mode of being which sinks into the predispositions of the self. That which goes out from the self to the other is a liking for the gorgeous, and it adorns brilliantly. But that which sinks into the self has no other to whom it can display adornment, it does not adorn. (Kuki 1997, 53)

By maintaining that the geisha who manifests *iki* exists both as ornamental surface and as concealed depth, Kuki maintains that the geisha has a self, or is a self, apart from her relationship to the other. In this, Kuki understands the geisha as something much more like a real person than the infinitely differentiated but exhaustable and so interchangeable women Camus imagines. And though Pincus clearly sees this interiority as an imaginative field on which Kuki can exercise power, in fact by emphasizing concealment rather than the reflective surface that constituted a truly modern beauty, Kuki configures relations of power in a way that really undermines the power exercised by the spectator.

Karatani Kōjin tells us that the secret self was produced in Japan through the Christian discourse of confession; Foucault of course says that the same discourse produced the secret self in the West. Karatani's argument is that because Christian confession requires the penitent practitioner to confess not only to bad deeds but to bad thoughts, it

> requires one to exercise constant surveillance over one's inner thoughts. One must keep watch over one's 'interiority' at all times. One must scrutinize the passions that surge up 'within'.. It is this surveillance, in fact, that produces interiority. In the process the body and sexuality are discovered. (Karatani 1993, 179)

Consequent to the discovery of the body and sexuality, Karatani says, the Japanese found themselves afflicted by a new sickness, the sickness of *ai*, romantic love, which "was for them a kind of religious fever... communicated through literature even to those who had had no direct contact with Christianity" (Karatani 1993, 83). This kind of love was what would be identified as "conventional"; it was a surrendering of the self to the other, made public through marriage. In his *Duties to the Body,* Immanuel Kant characterizes this kind of love as a morally appropriate *commercium sexuale*:

> if I yield myself completely to another and obtain the person of the other in return, I win myself back; I have given myself up as the property of another but in turn I take that other as my property, and so win myself back again in winning the person whose property I have become. In this way the two persons become a unity of will. (Kant 113)

With the appearance of *ai*, *iki* was rediscovered as its opposite, a morally inappropriate (and so aesthetically desirable) love trade in which the self does not give itself as property, nor claim the other as its own; there remains, in *iki*, a fundamental disunity of will. Where romantic love was affirmed publicly, *iki* was kept private; likewise, despite its production inside a field of exchange, as we noted in the first chapter, *iki* prevents an engagement with the body as a buyable object.

As we know Kuki was himself a Catholic; despite this he was not interested in confession, but in what confession made possible; he was interested in the implanted secret (Foucault 86), which *ai* made public and thus destroyed but which *iki* concealed and preserved. If *iki* appeared to be proof that Japan had produced its own kind of love in which there was no unity of will, then it makes sense that Kuki would look to the religions that predated Christianity's presence in Japan to uncover a discourse about love that did not revolve around confession or the moment of union through revelation. Thus while he takes up the fields of body and sexuality produced by confessional discourse, he turns first to Shinto and then to Buddhism in his attempts to explain how it is that *iki* developed as a uniquely Japanese mode of inhabiting a body. In the next chapter, we'll look more closely at the extent to which Kuki is working not only with European thought, but with the Buddhist thought that permeates Japanese philosophy.

CHAPTER THREE — RESIGNATION

In his Paris work, Kuki suggests that when he says Buddhism, we should think Zen: he explains the notion of *nirvana* with reference to Bodhidharma, he discusses Japanese music with reference to Hakuin, and he argues that because of the national affinity for Zen, "All Japanese without exception can feel a kind of 'intellectual sympathy'" for Bergson (Kuki in Light 74). His reading of Zen however is, in certain respects, incompetent. He is almost surely coming at Zen via Nishida Kitarō, whom he's identified as "perhaps the most profound thinker in Japan today" (Kuki in Light 72). But the understanding of Zen's aim that Kuki sketches out in the Paris work is deeply at odds with Nishida's own understanding. Look at what Kuki tells his French audience:

> In Japanese Buddhism we sometimes find tendencies which consider the satisfaction of desire, even when carried to excess, permissible. Desire is nothing when one learns to envisage it as a phantom. As soon as the will is conquered and attachment to the illusion of the ego vanquished by the intellect, by knowledge, the desire which has been satisfied becomes something unreal. (Kuki in Light 48)

The claim here that Buddhism functions as a simple negation — a conquering of the will by the intellect — is set up as a foil for the privileging of Shinto-*bushidō*, which negates the negation by valorizing the will. But the schism Kuki invents here between intellect and will is not present for Nishida, who argues instead that Zen reveals "that in actuality both have the same character... The laws of reason, which say, 'It must be like this,' and the tendency of the will, which simply says, 'I want it to be like this,' appear to be completely different, but when we consider them carefully we see that they share the same foundation" (Nishida 1990, 28).

When he returns to Japan, Kuki will shift his reading of Buddhism, so that it no longer serves as a means for the self (as reasoning agent) to overcome the self (as the

activity of will), but instead fosters an attitude of self (as the activity of will) resigning itself to an external will (of fate or karma): "the Buddhist world view is one which sees transmigration and transience as the form of the determined and puts nothingness and nirvana as the principle of the non-determined. It is a religious view of life which basically preaches resignation in the face of evil karma and teaches contemplation towards fate" (Kuki 1997, 43). The reading of Buddhism in *'Iki' no kōzō* is accomplished largely through allusion and implication; although it is plain that Kuki sees *iki* as connected with Buddhism in some way, and intends particularly for the element of *akirame* to have a Buddhist implication (Clark in Kuki 1997, 136 *fn*45), there is almost no explicit reference to Buddhism, and certainly no identification of any particular school of Buddhism. However, it seems to me that what Kuki is doing in *'Iki' no kōzō* is moving from a *jiriki* [self-power] Buddhism to a *tariki* [other-power] Buddhism, or from Zen to Shin, because he finds in Shin a more productive ground on which to construct an aesthetics that maintains a tension between interiority and exteriority, or self and other. My tasks in this chapter are to uncover the ways in which Mahāyāna thought permeates Kuki's subject matter, and to assert that Kuki's understanding of Shin thought in particular is strange but nonetheless legitimate.

Contingency and eternity in Mahāyāna Buddhism

By characterizing the Buddhist world view as putting into opposition the determined transient world of *samsāra* and the non-determined realm of nirvana, Kuki is able to easily map Baudelaire's concern for the contingent and the eternal onto the contours of Buddhism. An obvious starting place for a discussion of contingency as understood in Buddhism is the notion of *pratītyasamutpāda*. *Pratītyasamutpāda*, literally dependent

origination, is variously translated as conditioned genesis (Rāhula 29), chain of causation (Basham in Embree, 96), and contingent emergence (Batchelor). One of the usual ways of explaining *pratītyasamutpāda* is with reference to the list of twelve conditioning factors that bring life-as-suffering into existence. The notion that these twelve factors are causally connected through the activity of karma underlies the Theravadin Buddhist soteriological argument that, if the cause is prevented the effect will not arise — "When this is, that is / This arising, that arises / When this is not, that is not / This ceasing, that ceases" (Rāhula 53): this is the truth of cessation. The observation that a thing only comes into existence if the correct conditions prevail, or that a thing's existence is dependent on its conditions, informs the argument that all dharmas are empty of inherent existence. Because all dharmas are empty of inherent existence they are able to come into being and pass out again — this emptiness is the necessary condition of the activity of being.

When *pratītyasamutpāda* is translated as contingent emergence, the implication seems to be an emphasis on interdependency — because this, then that; because you, then me. Engaged Buddhist ethics are often built upon the notion that a deep insight into *pratītyasamutpāda* produces an awareness of the self as dependent for its existence on all other dharmas. Buddhist psychologies can be built on a claim that this insight invests the self with some kind of control over the activity of being. Stephen Batchelor offers a good example of how the ethics and the psychology can be twinned: "Having configured 'self,' 'mind,' 'body' and 'world' as discrete things, each feels cut-off from the other, thus blocking the flow of life... a depressed feeling of being trapped in a destiny over which one has no control" (Batchelor). An understanding of contingency as "this only if that, me only if you" presents a vision of reality as "vital, unblocked, interactive and interpenetrating"

(Batchelor) in a way that affirms the potency and freedom of the self. This kind of contingent relation — if this, then that — is what Kuki, following Hegel, characterizes in his *Guzensai no mondai* (*The Question of Contingency*) as hypothetical contingency or hypothetical necessity.

In Mahāyāna thought, however, a different kind of logic can be brought to bear on *pratītyasamutpāda*.. This is a logic of disjunctive contingency or disjunctive necessity — either this or that. This can be restated as because not this, then that, or because not you, then me. A relation of disjunctive contingency puts this and that into a relation of dependency too, because by insisting that this only comes into being if that doesn't come into being, the trace of that is always borne in the presence of this; this self is always in a relation of obligation to that other because this self is constituted by nothing but the absence of the other. By shifting the focus from the chain of causation to the emptiness that permeates causation, Mahāyāna may reject a vision of *pratītyasamutpāda* unfolding through time, and instead understand it as a claim for what Charles Sabatino calls "equiprimordiality": in his interpretation of Masao Abe, Sabatino suggests that on Abe's view, "coming into being and passing away do not represent two separate processes, one life and another death. Rather, life-death are two aspects of the very same process concerning everyone and everything. To exist is already to be dying and passing away" (Sabatino 4). This interpretation does not go far enough, in my opinion, because Sabatino is not attentive enough to the implications of his own term, equiprimordiality. If every element of the chain of causation is already primordially present, then there is no arising, and no causation at all; certainly there are not two processes, but nor is there a single process. There is no process at all — this is why in Mahāyāna there can be a full

development of the notion of original awakening, why there can be the assertion that there is no-arising and no-cessation, why Dōgen can argue that winter does not turn into spring (Dōgen 71). The disjunctive pair here is in a relation of dependence, and so in a relation of both identity and difference.

The Theravadin soteriology is teleological and progressive; the Mahāyāna soteriology seems to me to potentially problematize both teleology and progress: "Since all is void, where can the dust alight?" Instead it offers a radical equating of the disjunctive pairs of problem and solution, and suffering and liberation. The depressed feeling Batchelor talks about — the experience of being trapped by one's own destiny — becomes, in Japanese Buddhism, itself the experience of liberation. This is why Kuki's reading of Zen in the Paris work as having as its aim a state in which "the torrent of being is stopped" (Light 50) seems to me so inept; the torrent of being is itself *nirvana* under the terms of Mahāyāna logic. His deployment of Buddhism becomes much more skillful, I think, when he relocates it to the *ukiyo*.

The floating world

The style of *iki* originated in the *ukiyo*, the floating world, a cultural space with a vocabulary that was full of references to Mahāyāna Buddhism. *Ukiyo* was an Edoite pun on *kugai*, which meant both the bitter world or the world of suffering (Pincus1996, 134, Jenkins 4) and the world of prostitution. In Buddhism of course, the world of suffering is the ordinary world, the world in which everything is impermanent, in which nothing sticks. Sophisticated (or jaded) Edoites took up the problem of transience and made a virtue out of it —

> Living only for the moment, turning our full attention to the pleasures of the moon, the snow, the cherry blossoms and the maple leaves; singing songs, drinking wine,

> diverting ourselves in just floating, floating; caring not a whit for the pauperism staring us in the face, refusing to be disheartened, like a gourd floating along with the river current: this is what we call the floating world. (Asai Ryōi cited in Traganou)

This image of floating suggests a more literal translation of *kugai* as 'sea of grief'. This refers to the image of *samsāra* as an enormous body of water in which the practitioner is drowning, Hakuin's "sea of poison" (Hakuin 115). But if water has some cultural association with *dukkha*, it has a matched association with liberation from *dukkha* — "The person who once sees the True Lotus is like the man who pours the bowl of water into all rivers and lakes. Unconsciously he leaps into the great sea of *Nirvana* of the various Buddhas" (Hakuin 93). The association with water was easy to make, because the *ukiyo* was literally surrounded by water, and metaphorically behaved like water.

Although identified most strongly with the Yoshiwara red light district, "true to its name, the 'floating world' was constantly shifting in location" (Traganou). As the Yoshiwara style, based on an inverting of the elite's Confucian emphasis on virtue and hierarchy — "Motivated by 'the shame of the Five Precincts, the dishonour of the Yoshiwara,' the Yoshiwara courtesan could 'repeatedly snub even the conventional rich" (Kuki 1997, 41) — became a popular style, every public space became a theatre in which to stage "the floating quality of Edo" (Traganou; Monnai). At the same time, even to the extent that the districts of Edo were fixed or enclosed — "the action of spatial enclosure became an important factor for...creating social differentiation and identity" (Traganou) — they were enclosed *by water*: the layout of Edo was based on a canal system that enforced class segregation and hierarchy (Jun). But this structure was undone in the pleasure quarters; the Yoshiwara was "a world apart, a district in which men could for once free themselves of distinctions of social rank" (Nishiyama 38-39) and style bought social

success. Heritage and class status, bought nothing — the usual markers of social standing had to be left at the gate (Nishiyama 54). Read as a text, the city plan of Edo seems to predict the eventual ascendancy of the Yoshiwara style: the connection between status and real power was fluid, not fixed, and the style of the city of water would ultimately saturate Edo entirely. By the time of Kuki's writing, it was possible to read Edo as a text — Kuki did not live in Edo, he lived in Tokyo, which bore the readable trace of Edo. There is a doubling of liminality here: Kuki is writing about Edo's *démimonde*, which was the *ukiyo*, but *ukiyo* style was so thoroughly identified with Edo style that the larger world of the city could stand in for the smaller *démimonde*, so that the Tokyoite's *démimonde* existed not as an isolated physical location but as an isolated location of memory — a *démimonde* in time rather than in space.

In this image of the floating world then, we see expressed both the idea that life in the floating world was a life in which desires would not be satisfied and happiness was fleeting, a life of *dukkha* — "because I cannot get what I crave for, this is called the drear floating world, and I give up my desire as an impossible wish" (*Nagauta* cited in Kuki 1997, 42 *fn*131) — and the idea that this very quality of impermanence allowed for a kind of freedom of movement. If success in the real world was out of the question, the Edo-ite would make a game out of failure, drifting "in the light swirl of things, without floating free" (*Nagauta* cited in Kuki 1997, 42 *fn*28).

At the same time that the Yoshiwara represented the private against the public, an economy of style against an economy of money, surface against depth, a world of water against a world of earth, it also represented the feminine against the masculine. We've seen in his treatment of *ikiji* that the figures who really compel Kuki's attention are not the

samurai who visit the Yoshiwara but the lowlifes who actually live there, who are, in some sense, stuck there. In the same way, it is not ultimately the *tsū* who passes back and forth from the fixed world to the floating world who Kuki takes to embody *iki* but the geisha and prostitutes who are fixed within the boundaries of the *ukiyo*.. If it is women who have power inside the floating world, women's bodies which can take the shape of *iki*, women who are associated with the qualities of water under the terms of both Eastern discourse and Western, it is also women who are in the paradoxical position of living permanently in a state of flux, forbidden by law to pass beyond the gate of the *ukiyo*.

When Kuki locates Buddhism inside the *ukiyo* then, he is locating it in a feminine world, and in doing this, he is able to take advantage of another set of allusions already in play. Above, we've discussed the connection made between nirvana and the floating world. Building on this, we find observers of the Yoshiwara pointing out the parallels between the training required to become enlightened and the training required to become stylish — "Unless one sits on a triple-thick mattress for nine years, he will not penetrate the secret of how to buy a courtesan" (Santō Kyōden cited in Pincus 1996, 123). Leslie Pincus suggests that Kuki must have read (though perhaps, she says, not liked) Tamenaga Shunsui, who compares the prostitute's ten-year period of indenturation with Bodhidharma's nine years of *zazen*: "Not nine, but ten years, decked out in flowery robes they do their time in a world of grief; once you reach enlightenment, how delightful, this transient world of pleasure" (cited in Pincus 1996, 143). The idea that the training of the courtesan involves a kind of religious discipline is further pressed home in a passage Kuki himself cites from *Yūgiri*: "people's hearts are like the Asuka river — to change is the habitude of the profession" (cited in Kuki 1997, 42). The profession referred to here is that

of the courtesan or the prostitute, who cannot rely on the faithfulness of her patrons, but the word for profession is *tsutome*, duty or business, which, as John Clark points out, has a religious undertone — in the *Tale of Genji*, *tsutome* refers to the morning practices of Buddhism (Kuki 1997, 131 *fn*26). The confusion of the monastic life and the life of the prostitute was reinforced during the Edo period by the phenomenon of the *ukiyo-bikuni*, "nun of doubtful reputation" (Domiková-Hashimoto 3), prostitutes who dressed as itinerant nuns, and confirmed for Kuki's generation by Edo-period slang for prostitutes, who were referred to not only as nuns, but as *daruma*, Bodhidharma dolls (Hockley 52).

It is clearly possible to claim then that at the level of punning, life in the *ukyio* can supplant or displace religious practice, that "the world of *iro* (a word signifying both deceptive appearances and pleasures of the flesh) was a more than adequate substitute for Buddhist enlightenment" (Pincus 1996, 135). This is Leslie Pincus's take on Tamenaga, and she characterizes this substitution as impious, suggesting that Kuki was too sincere to take this jaded view himself. But it seems to me that many of Tamenaga's contemporaries imagined a relationship between the world of *iro* (having the sense of both colour and sensuality) and the world of *kenshō* which did not propose that the one might substitute for the other, but rather that, beneath the level of punning, life in the *ukiyo* could produce a kind of awakened heart. On this view, if the two worlds are in tension, it is not because they are so different, but because they are so close to each other:

> Sitting at the main gate of Hogonn-ji temple in Dogo 1895
> the pleasure quarter
> just ten steps away
> autumn wind. (Shiki)

Certainly the description of life in the floating world we encountered earlier from Asai Ryōi, with its catalogue of seasonally appropriate things to enjoy — moon, snow, cherry

blossom, maple leaves — is meant to convince us that the person who chooses the pleasure quarter is no less attuned to the natural world than the hermit poet who masters the fifteen hundred season-words of *haiku*.. Taking up residence in the Yoshiwara was not an alternative to reclusion, but was itself seen as a *kind of reclusion*. It was a retreat from public life into a private world, and yet, paradoxically, a move from the inside to the outside; choosing "the marginal world-apart-from- the-world" constituted, as Ian Buruma puts it, "a kind of exile" (Buruma 91). Becoming *iki* meant committing yourself to the floating world, leaving the conventional world of morality outside the gate for good — "the time when 'I know it's a bit conventional, but we're a devoted couple like a pair of birds,' already departs far from the condition of *iki*" (Kuki 1997, 45). Ōhashi Ryōsuke characterizes the Japanese notion of beauty as revolving around the act of cutting (*kire*), that moment where the beautiful, like Vairocana's sword, rises up from within to manifest as the world (Suzuki 90). In *iki*, "The everydayness is 'cut,' but just through this cut is produced a new everyday life in which one is aware of the mortality of everyday life. The renunciation of Buddhism is a decisive 'kire'" (Ōhashi cited in Botz-Borstein 1998, 565). *Iki* is that which "'cuts' naturalness" — disorders it, in Kuki's words — "and expresses it again as an art through this discontinuity" (Ōhashi in Marra 2002, 34). So when Kuki describes the resigned heart as "an urbane and well-formed heart which has gone through the polishing of the hard and heartless floating world" (Kuki 1997, 42) the evoking of the religious imagery of mutual polishing is serious: the experience of living in the floating world, and particularly the experience of the geisha, is supposed to be understood as time spent in practice. The shift from nun to geisha relies in part on the set of linguistic

associations present in Japanese, but it also relies on the inversions performed in Jōdo Shinshū thought.

Shinran's two inversions

Leslie Pincus points out that Kuki attributes the impulse towards *akirame* to Shin Buddhism — "a purely Japanese Buddhism identified with the medieval religious figures Hōnen and Shinran. Both are associated with Buddhist doctrines that stressed the futility of salvation by one's own power and advocated entrusting oneself to the saving grace of Amida Buddha" (Pincus 1996, 226). This gloss gets at the principle of practice based in other-power shared by Hōnen and Shinran, but does not take up the essential difference between the two. Hōnen's teachings allow for a straightforward ethics and a straightforward teleology. He does not suggest that evil people cannot receive Amida's grace, but he clearly, sensibly states that it is better to be virtuous than to be evil — "even the evil person attains birth in the Pure Land, how much more so the good person" (cited in Shinran 1990, 22). Hōnen's ethics clearly privilege doing good over doing evil. Likewise, the Pure Land is plainly, or so it seems to me, a *telos* for Hōnen:

> All I've sought in life was
> the work of nembutsu,
> That in death I would make the round
> to the Pure Land.
> Whatever fate befell me personally,
> come what may,
> Never once did I lose my concentration
> or put my goal in jeopardy. (Hōnen)

Hōnen expects practitioners to work at being good, to seek the work of *nembutsu*, so that in death we will be grasped by Amida and brought into the transcendent Pure Land. Shinran was Hōnen's student, but his own teaching brings much of what he was taught into question by inverting Hōnen's ethics and teleology.

Shinran's inverted ethics are hinted at in the *Kyōgyōshinshō*'s commentary on the Primal Vow of Amida Buddha. The vow itself identifies the truly evil as those who are excluded from Amida's infinite compassion, those who are very bad indeed — "Excluded are those who commit the five grave offenses and those who slander the dharma" (Shinran 1983, 185). The standard Mahāyāna interpretation of this had been that this exclusion clause was intended to reinforce to the practitioner the seriousness of these transgressions; if nothing else, the practitioner must at a bare minimum be expected to avoid committing any of the five offenses or slandering the dharma (Shinran 1983, 194). But Shinran presents these offenses as unavoidable. It is, on his view, beyond the capacity of a human being not to fall into this behaviour. And so while he takes the traditional Mahāyāna view as far as the gravity of the five offenses, he rejects the notion of exclusion: "*Excluded* means that those who commit the five grave offenses are rejected and reveals how grave the evil of slandering the dharma is. By showing the gravity of these two kinds of wrongdoing, these words make us realize that all the sentient beings throughout the ten quarters, without a single exception, will be born in the Pure Land" (Shinran 1983, 187). Exclusion here is made identical to inclusion — we are all guilty, so we will all be saved.

Shinran's view of the guilty person is radicalized in the *Tannishō* where he is recorded as declaring that if "Even a good person is born in the Pure Land, how much more so is an evil person!" (Shinran 1990, 22) This is a rejection of Hōnen's formulation, and an absolute inversion of the categories of good and evil. Where ordinarily Mahāyāna texts urge that we should at least try to be good in order to effect our salvation, Shinran tells us that we can only be evil, that our evil nature itself is the ground of salvation — he argues that those who attempt to be virtuous fly in the face of "the purport of the Original Vow, of

the Other-Power... those who practice good by their self-power lack the mind to rely wholly on the Other-Power" (Shinran 1990, 22). Evil here is the ground of Amida's salvific activity; it is itself the manifesting of Amida's grace.

Shinran also disrupts Hōnen's teleology, in two ways. First, where for Hōnen salvation through true entrusting is guaranteed, Shinran seems to put this into question. In the *Tannishō* it is written, "I am entirely ignorant as to whether the Nembutsu is really the cause of Birth in the Pure Land, or whether it is the karma [action] which will cause me to fall into hell. I will have no regrets, even though I should have been deceived by Hōnen Shōnin" (Shinran 1990, 19-20). So it's not clear that anyone should be confident that practice will lead to birth in the Pure Land. Second, it's not obvious that the Pure Land is anything other than the ordinary world of the evil person. In his discussion of Shinran's teleology, Dennis Hirota describes Amida's paradise in the terms we might be accustomed to — "the Pure Land is conceived as transcending the realm of mundane desires and all human contingency" (Hirota 21). A page later, he tells us "Ultimate reality transcends all conceptualization, and further is inseparable from contingent, defiled existence in this world and the dynamic activity of wisdom-compassion" (Hirota 22-23). So we can make this logical, at least for a moment, if we argue that there is no distinction between ultimate reality and existence in this world, but that the Pure Land is located somewhere outside both, neither nirvana nor *samsāra*. However, Hirota has also said "birth [in the Pure Land] is also conceived as either a stage to final attainment of Buddhahood or as attainment itself, in which case one immediately returns to this world to work compassionately to save other beings" (Hirota 22). The implication here is that it is at least possible that birth in the Pure Land is identical with the final attainment of nirvana, and where do we go when we attain

nirvana? We go immediately back to *samsāra*, back to hell: "since I am incapable of any practice whatsoever, hell is my only home" (Shinran in *Jōdo Shinshū seiten* 140). Now it sounds as though this ordinary world is the Pure Land; Amida is here, in hell, with us.

But Shinran seems to have stated unequivocally that this is not, in fact, the Pure Land, that we cannot attain rebirth with this body, in this life —

> Some persons say that we have already attained Enlightenment even with our bodies full of evil passions. This is a most unreasonable view... Since we are embraced (by the Light) once and for all at the moment Faith is established, and are never forsaken, we shall not transmigrate in the six evil realms. Hence, 'severing us forever from Birth-and-Death.' How is such an understanding to be distorted as 'attaining Enlightenment'? What a pitiful thing! (Shinran 1990, 61, 65)

Now here it looks as though when we enter into true entrusting we go beyond birth-and-death, or are brought beyond birth-and-death. This can't happen with blind passion intact because true entrusting effects a conversion of blind passion to wisdom-compassion — "when life ends, all passions and evil hindrances are turned (into Bodhi) and we are enlightened to the Truth of Birthlessness" (Shinran 1990, 58). So but this isn't birth in the Pure Land; the Pure Land is where we are born with evil karma intact. This is birth as Buddha: "if we have extinguished our evil passions, we are already Buddhas, and for Buddhas, the Vow contemplated for five kalpas would not be necessary" (Shinran 1990, 55).

I can describe what I think is happening here by pointing out the two ways of characterizing Amida's activity. We can characterize Amida as reaching for us, attempting to bring us back to him — *ōsō ekō*, the advancing movement. And we can characterize Amida as grasping us, "never to be abandoned" (Shinran T.ref) — *gensō ekō*, the returning movement. So long as we are running around being evil, Amida continues to reach for us; the Original Vow is meaningful as long as we are not in the Pure Land. The notion that

Amida reaches towards us depends on the fact of the ordinary person being outside of Amida's grasp. Once we are grasped by Amida, our attainment is settled; we become indistinguishable from Amida. The Vow becomes meaningless once the Vow is realized. This is the death of the self, but it is also, in the completion of the Vow, the death of Amida, whose existence *is* the activity of the Vow — "the inconceivabilities of the Vow and the Name are one and not two separate things" (Shinran 1990, 40).

This, to my mind, puts into doubt whether we can speak of grasping if the grasp itself effects the disappearance of both the agent who grasps and the patient who is grasped. In a commentary on Shan Tao's "Coming to Welcome," Shinran writes, "*Come* means to cause to come to the Pure Land... *To welcome* means that Amida receives us, awaits us" (Shinran 1983b 261-62). Obviously there's a tremendous gulf between receiving and awaiting. So the question for me is, given that our evilness is the ground for Amida's compassion, and given that this relationship of opposition indicates a fundamental duality, can we in fact be received? Tamura Yoshirō, in a discussion of Honen's thought, characterizes this as the problem of infinite approach —

> the doctrine of attainment of Buddhahood by religious observance implies that Buddha and common worldlings are relative to one another, and falls thereby into the logical contradiction of infinitely approaching Buddha (the awakened state) but forever being unable to reach it. In other words, even when the difference between Buddha and common worldlings diminishes, it never disappears, and one must conclude to the impossibility of ever completing the practice and becoming a Buddha. (Tamura 256)

A doctrine of Original Awakening is meant to overcome this contradiction, and Tamura suggests that this is how Shinran develops Hōnen's thought — "It is a synthesis by sublation of both the absolute monism and affirmation of factual reality of Tendai's Original Awakening thought and the relative dualism and negation of factual reality of

Hōnen's Pure Land Nembutsu conception" (Tamura 254). This understanding of Shinran as sublating the categories of relative and absolute places him in a category with Dōgen, who likewise, Tamura says, reverses the direction of practice, so that we no longer go from practice to awakening but from awakening to practice: "practice is not terminated by attaining Buddhahood, for on each and every step of the practice the Buddha is manifested and realized. Couched in Other-Power language, this means to be enveloped and embraced by the Buddha" (Tamura 265). Dennis Hirota's discussion of Jōdo Shinshū teleology effects the same reversal, I think,

> Shinran reaffirms the power and validity of Amida and the Pure Land — not as objects of will, but as manifestations of reality as wisdom-compassion perceiving beings and moving toward and within them... both personal and teleological images are affirmed as expressive of the natural dynamic of the transcendent, and they direct the practitioner to a new awareness of the self in the world, and to a full and positive involvement in everyday life. (Hirota 20)

I would like to argue that these reversals, while heuristically helpful, do not in fact address the real conceptual problems presented by Shinran's elision between receiving and awaiting. Tamura's treatment of practice takes up the notion of original awakening but rests on the idea of some kind of attainment. He is at once claiming that there is some self who can practice and thereby attain Buddhahood and claiming that practice is always only a realization of Buddhahood. The paradox here between attainment and realization is unresolvable — if there is a transitional moment of attainment, then of course practice is terminated, because whoever was practicing before is replaced by a realized Buddha. If there is no transitional moment of attainment — if practice has always been Buddha manifesting Buddha — then there is no collapse of the self into Buddha, and so the gap between original mind and self remains intact. Hirota's version is more subtle, I think, but falls prey to the same paradox. By suggesting that we understand Amida and the Pure

Land not as objects toward which or into which the practitioner moves but as the reality toward which and within which the practitioner moves, Hirota elides the difference between toward and within — the real problem of teleology remains, because Hirota treats as equivalent a telos that we move toward (a contingent telos that may or may not come to pass) and a telos that we are already inside of (a necessary telos that has already come to pass). The readings that Tamura and Hirota offer attempt to preserve contingency by suggesting that practice continues in a meaningful way even after the practitioner has awakened, or been embraced and brought into the Pure Land, but their basic outlook is one of necessity — the practitioner is necessarily already awakened or embraced. Shinran himself, however, says this: "Reaching the ultimate end of the One Vehicle is without bound and without cessation" (Shinran 1983, *fasc*84). I think this suggests a basic outlook of contingency insofar as it indicates a reaching without cessation rather than an embrace.

Kuki's two inversions

Kuki did his doctoral work on contingency; he finished his dissertation in 1932, and it was published as *Guzensai no mondai* in 1935, six years after the publication of *'Iki' no kōzō*. Botz-Bornstein suggests that contingency as understood by Kuki — "contingency is established when one observes a internal and indisolvable relation between being and non-being... a state in which being is founded on nothingness, a form in which nothingness permeates being" (Kuki 1935, 1)[8] — becomes a way of expressing the truth of impermanence:

> Kuki is looking, then, for a new concept of time that should be linked to contingency. He believes that reality does not appear to us within a "now of the present" but that it should be conceived as a dynamic development. Reality is no static phenomenon that appears inside a present "actuality": it is dynamized

[8] "la contingence est établie lorsqu'on peut observer une relation interne et indissoluble entre l'existence et la non-existence... état dans lequel l'être se base sur le néant, forme dans laquelle le néant s'imprégne d'être"

> through the negation of time as a necessary consecution of past, present, and future elements. This concept of time, of course, is also founded on ideas that are particularly Buddhist. (Botz-Bornstein 1999, 482)

Botz-Bornstein goes on to discuss Kuki in relation to first Masao Abe, and then Dōgen. He thus locates Kuki's treatment of historical time — karma — inside Zen's suggestion that "We have the possibility, for example, of being liberated from karma through an act of personal choice" (Botz-Bornstein 1999, 482). But this selection of Abe and Dōgen seems to be capricious; Kuki himself does not frame his discussion of contingency in *Guzensai no mondai* with Zen. He explicitly frames it with Pure Land: Schopenhauer's contingency of necessity expresses, he says, the same idea expressed in the introduction to the *Kyōgyōshinshō*: "Si tu obtiens la foi par chance, remercie ton *destin* (*Karma*)" (Kuki 1966, 170). This line is more literally translated into English as "If you should come to realize this practice and *shinjin*, rejoice at the conditions from the distant past that have brought it about" (Shinran 2001, preface) but Kuki's reading emphasizes the apparent conflict between luck and karma here in order to establish the ground on which he will later claim that in Pure Land thought, the usual positions of contingency and necessity are inverted, so that the present is contingent and the future is necessary (Kuki 1966, 195). This is Kuki's first inversion; it means then not a liberation from karma but a liberation through karma, so that the contingent choices we make in the historical present produce an infinite future:

> The minute possibility, the virtually impossible, becomes reality by chance, and this chance produces a new chance, unfolding into necessity: in this chance is the salvation of man, through the Buddha's desire for salvation as fate. To give the meaning of eternal fate to the contingency that contains nihility at its core, whose destiny is to pass out of being, is the only way to invest the present with the life of the future. (Kuki 1966, 195-196)[9]

[9] "L'infime possibilité proche de l'impossible devient réalité dans la contingence, et cette contingence produisant de nouveau une nouvelle contingence, se développe jusqu'à la nécessité: en cela est le salut de l'homme, par le désir de salut même du Bouddha comme destin. Pour donner un sens de destin éternel à la contingence qui contient en elle-même le néant et dont le destin est de se perdre, il n'y a d'autre moyen que de

The implication here is that the future is never achieved, but infinitely out in front of us, always a possibility, and it is this constant presencing of the future that makes the present more than just the presencing of nothingness. If the present and future were somehow to collapse into each other — or if, as Kuki also puts it, the I were to interiorise the you (Kuki 1966, 195) — the meeting would constitute a sealing of fate, and a termination of being.

The same constant approach of the contingent and the necessary constitutes the dynamic proxiteleology of *iki*. Kuki's vision of the geisha bringing herself ever closer to the object of her heart's affection without quite touching him is an accurately observed picture of a certain kind of skillfulness — "they sit upright beside me, and yet their sleeves are gently touching mine" (Burgess) or "the more he tried to distance himself the more Reiko, with those long easy strides, drew closer, and walked just beside him, almost touching him" (Kuki 1997, 39) — but it is also a description of the impossibility of overcoming the infinite distance between self and other. The suspended motion of coming near without meeting seems to me to be what really establishes a thing as *iki*. It is what marks a relationship between people as *iki* and it is what marks a design as *iki*:

> Parallel lines which run forever without meeting are the purest visual objectification of the relational. It is certainly no accident that the stripe, as design, is regarded as *iki*... a design does not express *iki* when it suggest umbrella spokes converging on a hub, or fan spokes running to the pivot, or a spider's web with a centre, or the morning sun radiating to the four quarters. To manifest *iki*, disinterestedness and purposelessness must be expressed on the basis of the visual sense. Radial stripes gathering to a central point complete their purpose. For this reason they may not be felt to be *iki*. (Kuki 1997, 87, 92)

So anything which completes its purpose is not *iki*.. It is *akirame* that prevents *ikiji* from completing its purpose: if there is too much *ikiji*, there is the risk of engaging in purposeful action, undoing possibility by appropriating it.. This kind of appropriating love is

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vivifier le présent par le futur"

conventional love. The metaphor of love as appropriation is literalized in the context of the floating world, where in order for the geisha to have a conventional relationship, her contract — her life — must be purchased by her suitor. If there is too much *akirame*, *iki* perhaps loses its shine — brave composure, Kuki says, "emphasizes the quality of coquetry as a state of being by increasing its brilliance and making its angles sharp" (Kuki 1997, 44). But it is *akirame* that preserves the other as unappropriated possibility, and in preserving the other, preserves the self:

> In not attaining its hypothetical aim coquetry remains loyal to the self. And for this reason not only is coquetry's resignation towards the object not irrational, it actually reveals coquetry's original quality as a state of being. The fusion of coquetry with 'resignation' means that the conversion to freedom is coerced by fate, and that the supposition of this possibility is determined by necessity.. That is, one sees affirmation through this negation. (Kuki 1997, 44)

The nature of *iki* is to be bounded but without cessation — "something in which a relational and dynamic possibility between the sexes is made absolute" (Kuki 1997, 39). In this respect I want to say it carnalizes Shinran, whose far more serious concern was with the relational and dynamic possibility between the self and Amida, between the evil beings "born in the Border Land, the Realm of Sloth and Pride, the Castle of Doubt, the Womb-palace" where they make atonement and the Buddha whose being is atonement (Shinran 1990, 41). But the trifling choice of subject that Kuki makes gets its inspiration from Shinran, who, particularly as he was understood in the early 20th century, shifted the focus of practice from the ascetic to the ordinary person.

In the *Tannishō*, Shinran is presented as taking pains to disassociate himself from the monastic world, comparing the "Difficult Practices to be performed only by the highly gifted" to his own *nembutsu* practice, "the Easy Practice to be performed by the lowly gifted, and... a teaching which does not choose between good and evil" (Shinran 1990, 62).

This understanding of non-discrimination would deeply inform Jōdo Shinshū thought, from Issa Kobayashi's concern with everything diminutive to Yanagi Soetsu's understanding of Shin as the "religion of beauty" which "transcends the duality of beauty and ugliness" (Andreasen 94). Because Shinran's method of ethical practice is grounded in this non-differentiation, it is an ethical practice that does not permit judgments of good and bad, and so it is a non-ethical, non-practice: "The Nembutsu is non-practice and non-good for those who practice it. It is non-practice for us, because it is not the practice which we do out of our own contrivance; and it is non-good, because it is not the good which we do out of our own contrivance" (Shinran 1990, 31). *Nembutsu* is an effortless practice because it is not a practice at all. This non-differentiation between good and evil will be translated by modern thinkers into non-differentiation between beautiful and ugly — a non-aesthetic. In Kuki's case, effortless aesthetic practice will be understood as style, which becomes effortless through years of practice, and which shelves concern for beautiful or ugly outcome insofar as it shelves interest in outcome and focuses instead on performance. Kuki will thus understand the notion of infinite approach as a source of aesthetic possibility rather than as an ethical or soteriological problem: "The wanderer who continues the 'continuous finite,' the villain who delights in the evil infinite, Achilles who does not fall in pursuit of the immortal—only such people know true coquetry" (Kuki 1997, 39). Bergson would similarly valorize approach rather than consumption in his aesthetics of grace — "the idea of the future, pregnant with an infinity of possibilities, is thus more fruitful than the future itself, and this is why we find more charm in hope than in possession" (Bergson 1912, 10). By using Buddhist thought to introduce the element of *akirame*, Kuki is able to construct an unresolving dialectic in which hope never concludes

with possession but is maintained indefinitely; it is *ikiji* that impels the pursuit, that projects the present into the future, but it is *akirame* that restrains the pursuer and so preserves the future as an idea. In the final chapter, we will see that *akirame* again functions as a restraining element in the use of *iki* as a nationalist aesthetics.

CHAPTER FOUR — RESISTANCE

Stephen Light cautions us not to misunderstand Kuki's version of detachment: "We do not have here the detachment of the mystic or the eremite, rather we have the detachment of the flâneur. And in the flâneur we have in many respects Kuki himself" (Light 11). I want to counter now that *iki* can be understood best precisely by analogy with the exile of the eremite, whose ascetic practice "has as its primary orientation the transformation of the self into narrative so that it may be preserved and remembered" (Harpham 27). Light might I think distinguish the eremite from the *flâneur* on the basis of location — the eremite removes himself to the desert while the *flâneur* remains in the city — but if for Kuki life in the *ukiyo* was to be seriously considered a form of asceticism through excess, then the city was for him, as it was for Baudelaire, "a human desert" (Baudelaire 1922, 65). We've seen that Kuki's understanding of *akirame* is developed through a set of associations with Pure Land Buddhism. The same associations form the ground for a treatment of religious exile as constituted by a move out of the twinned public worlds of institutional religion and governmental service into the private world of the domestic. The retreat into the private will, in early twentieth century Japan, create a position from which it is possible to assume a posture of resistance or opposition, and I would propose that we can read *'Iki' no kōzō* as, in this sense, an oppositional text.

Shin and Japanese nationalism

The place Jōdo Shinshū occupied in prewar Japanese discourse is complicated. From 1872, institutional Shin, through its central arms of Higashi Honganji and Nishi Honganji, was tied up with the imperial government. As part of a strategy for self-preservation during the early Meiji years of *haibutsu kishaku*, the imperial abolishment of Buddhism, both the

Higashi Honganji and Nishi Honganji branches had loaned money to the government, and 25,000 Shin priests had become Doctrinal Instructors, effectively serving as state priests (Victoria 8). By the time Japan entered into open conflict with Korea, institutional Shin had aligned itself squarely on the side of the government and its war: "from the late Meiji through 1945, Hongan-ji became so supportive of the Japanese government that it has been described as the 'the guardian of the state'" (Amstutz 1996, 161). And the same collapsing of religious and political aims that commentators like Robert Sharf identify in Zen discourse was being conducted with Pure Land language. In 1894, the Nishi Honganji issued a statement directing practitioners to "value loyalty and filial piety, work diligently... and share in the trials and tribulations of the nation" (Victoria 20); by 1930, Pure Land imagery and militarist rhetoric had become profoundly intertwined: Kamenaga Kyoshin would tell practitioners that "The joy of religion is to be found in the life of gratitude where the self is cast away. In this crisis, what is demanded of us is to do away with our petty selves and become shields of the Emperor" (cited in Tokunaga and Bloom 200-201).. But while a conflation of state-power and other-power, through which the Emperor was identified with Amida and Yasukuni with the Pure Land, was institutionalized, it wasn't monolithic; Brian Victoria notes that a handful of Shin priests and practitioners spoke out against the war (Victoria 75).

Kiyozawa Manshi was among this handful, although Victoria doesn't mention him. Kiyozawa was perhaps among the most influential Shin thinkers to take a plainly anti-nationalist position; he did it by using the same notions of debt and repayment that were deployed in the first statement on the war by the Nishi Honganji in 1894, in which practitioners were told that "acting on the truth of repaying one's debt to the country

through absolute loyalty to it... is in accordance with the sect's teaching that the law of the sovereign is paramount" (Victoria 19). Kiyozawa positioned himself against this language of repayment by emphasizing the practitioner's incapacity; on his reading, repayment starts to look like a heretical insistence on self-power: he writes, "there are those in the world who talk a great deal about duty and responsibility — and perhaps there are times when we must speak of these things — but since we are dependent on the Other Power, *there is no duty or responsibility that holds us in such a way that we are compelled to do thus and so*" (cited in Johnston 36).

Kiyozawa's understanding of dependence then is a paradoxical one by which our very dependence constitutes our freedom — because we are incapable of fulfilling any duty, we cannot rightly be said to have duties at all. This freedom disrupts the relationship between the practitioner and the state because in insisting that she has no responsibility to the state, the practitioner loses access to her "share" in or of the state. Freedom effectively puts the practitioner into exile.

Shinran himself of course was an exile, sent to Echigo in 1207 when Hōnen's practice community was dissolved by imperial edict. During this time Shinran seems to have reimagined himself as *hisō-hizoku*, neither monk nor layman. As a doctrine, *hisō-hizoku* has important effects on Shin praxis, but it also has a straightforwardly political meaning — declaring oneself to be, in Mark Unno's words, not good enough to be either monk or layman, the practitioner is released from obligation, no longer required to occupy the position of either authority or supplicant. The practitioner *is* a kind of social failure, occupying no position, but from within the tradition it is suggested that in finding oneself at odds with society, one is given the opportunity to experience oneself as an

individual, utterly useless, utterly powerless, utterly alone. It is in this condition that the practitioner can realize the teaching that Amida's Vow was made for her only: "The Master used to say, 'When I carefully consider the Vow which Amida brought forth after five kalpas' contemplation, I find that it was solely for me, Shinran, alone" (Shinran 1990, 79). This is what it means to be in exile.

Kiyozawa would take up this notion of exile and deploy it against the hegemonic embrace of the state. In "Peace Beyond Ethics," he tells the reader that

> Socrates accepted his fate, drank the hemlock, and died. Shinran Shōnin courageously went into exile with a feeling of gratitude, believing that exile was a favour granted him by his master's teaching. Those individuals who were in the presence of the wondrous working did not see themselves as failures in any sense. (Andreasen 43)

This is Kiyozawa's critique of Meiji nationalism, which insisted on an absolute harmony between the state and its citizens. The 1868 Imperial Charter Oath declared that "The unity of the imperial and the feudal governments shall be achieved; all the people, even the meanest, shall be given full opportunities for their aspirations and activities" (Anesaki cited in Victoria 4); this section of the Oath, which perhaps was intended to suggest that a unified state would benefit every citizen, has the effect of totalizing the reach of the state — not one person, not even the meanest, will be overlooked; not one person will be provided with anything less than she requires. There will be then no reason to look beyond what the state provides, and no reason to reject what the state offers.

In countering this view, Kiyozawa makes use of the figure of the exile, who has quite a strange relationship with the state. The exile is one sense utterly obedient to the will of the state; the state sends her away and away she goes. In another sense however the exile represents a kind of triumph over the state — if she has been exiled for threatening the monolithic control of the state, then her existence as an exile itself represents the possibility

of living outside of the boundaries of that control. For Kiyozawa, Shinran's exile, like Socrates's suicide, functions as an affirmation of the individual against or above state authority. Kiyozawa's apparent concern with the notion of failure comes into focus only against the Meiji obsession with success; his insistence that "for the person who has awakened to the wondrous working of Tathāgata, there is no such thing as being a failure in life" (Andreasen 43) is an example of the reversal made possible by the notion of *akirame*, resignation. *Akirame* mediates social failure by in some loose sense spiritualizing it, so that the appropriately graceful response to failure becomes itself a kind of ethical or aesthetic success. This kind of paradoxical locating of success nowhere other than failure, or strength nowhere other than weakness, is central to the Jōdo Shinshū use of Mahāyāna formulas on the mutual identity of opposites. Postwar historian Nakai Masakazu would identify *akirame* as an inheritance from what he called "slave society" (cited in Pincus 1997); critics of Kiyozawa among the Marxist New Buddhists would identify Kiyozawa's *seishinshugi*, the way of the spirit, as weakened by its foundation in *akirame*, such that it could offer, they would charge, no impetus for meaningful social action. But for Kiyozawa, the idea that *akirame* is constituted by the experience of enslavement was no bad thing. As Gilbert Johnston points out, his reading of the *Tannishō* was deeply influenced by his reading of Epictetus, the Roman slave and philosopher whose stoicism, grounded on the claim that everything is perishable, resonates in obvious ways with Buddhism. What seems to have struck Kiyozawa was the fact of Epictetus's enslavement; it suggested to him the possibility of locating freedom within enslavement so that other-power has its effect of liberation not in the Pure Land but here in this very life: "without waiting until the world after death, the Tathāgata in which I trust has already

given me the greatest happiness in this life" (Andreasen 44). This liberation is not liberation from bad karma but from the responsibility of doing anything about it — this is why Kiyozawa understands Shin as beyond ethics, because he sees in Shinran's inversion of good and evil a rejection of the categories of good and evil: "There is no need for me to deliberate on what is good and evil, right or wrong. There is nothing I cannot do. I act as I please and I do as I am inclined. There is no need for me to be concerned about my every action, even if it turns out to be a mistake or a crime" (Andreasen 46). Within the enslavement of one's own evilness then, one's own bad karma, one is freed from the demands of behaving like a citizen bound to the state.

Aesthetic exile and the private self

Withdrawal and resignation are, on this understanding, a way of refusing national obligation and retreating into interiority[10]. In his *State and Intellectual in Imperial Japan*, Andrew Barshay suggests that we might locate Japan's Taisho intellectuals in terms of whether they were insiders or outsiders, public or private men, and he comments that while the insider had power, the outsider had a certain kind of freedom: "outsiders could legitimately 'withdraw' into (apparently innocuous) private, aesthetic concerns more easily than insiders, who were, ideologically speaking, 'on call' all the time" (Barshay 15). We have seen already how Kuki identified himself as an outsider, and that he sought to establish his samurai as an outsider, a private man quite unlike Okakura's public servant. His decision to privilege frivolity also functions as a privileging of the private over the

[10]This manoeuver will be revamped by later writers on Japanese uniqueness: "In later modern Japan, the notion of *akirame* would come to serve as a way out of social obligation: The overwhelming cultural pressure for social saturation, which includes gregariousness, conformity, performance of obligations, and other forms of self-denial, can be periodically counteracted by the retrieval of the socially immune inner self through self-reflection in isolation. That *akirame*, 'resignation,' and self-contentment are regarded as wise and mature attitudes provides a tension-reducing alternative to the loser in a culture obsessed with success and status-elevation" (Lebra 254).

public, the self over the group, and the internal over the external. In choosing the *ukiyo* as his subject, he was positioning himself against the serious art lauded by Okakura's generation in favour of the ephemera of the floating world: even the paintings of the *ukiyo* were disposable — *ukiyo-e* always had certain ephemerality, and at the end of the Edo were being used as wrapping paper prior to their recovery as art objects during the European vogue of *japonisme* (Hockley 8; Chiba). That is to say, Kuki was not interested in recovering an immune Japan, a Japan that was producing serious art for a serious citizenry — he was not, like Okakura, invested with an unmistakable sense of purpose and direction. Kuki was interested in recovering a decadent Japan that was producing art without purpose: during the late Edo, "'Shallowness' rather than 'depth,' frivolous and minor works, prevailed... Masamune Hakuchō called this age 'the heaven of idiocy'" (Karatani in Marra 1999, 276-277)[11]. Kuki's focus on the shallow and idiotic should indicate to us that he was staking a claim in one area left free of state intervention.

Andrew Barshay suggests that the assumption that the modern state encourages love of country has to be reconsidered. Drawing on the work of Simone Weil, he argues that the state in fact undoes love of country as it transforms the resident of a place into a citizen of the state: "the state marches," he says, "on the 'irrational,' affective sphere, the realm of passion and compassion. This process essentially consumes, or destroys, local attachments, love of place, even of country; ultimately it disallows all self-definition independent of the state" (Barshay xvii). Benjamin Constant, writing in the aftermath of

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[11]Karatani, *contra* Baudelaire, seems to define modernity in opposition to this lightness — the concern of modern artists is with depth and interiority he says, and *post-modernism* is preoccupied with lightness and superficiality. This is why Karatani argues that there is nothing interesting about Japanese post-modernism: "What we have today is precisely the nineteenth-century Edo from which modern Japanese literature indisputably came" (Karatani in Marra 1999, 273).

the French Revolution, comments that anything that identifies a people as belonging to a particular place — having a location, in the sense of possessing some distinguishing feature — is a problem for the state that seeks to control those people. He claims that "the interests and memories which spring from local customs contain a germ of resistance which is so distasteful to authority that it hastens to uproot it" (Constant 74); we should here think again of Walter Benjamin, who identifies the germ of resistance *as* memory, and the capacity to speak one's own history: "To articulate the past historically does not mean to recognize it 'the way it really was'.... It means to seize hold of a memory as it flashes up at a moment of danger" (Benjamin 255).

Interestingly enough, among the people who are making persuasive use of Benjamin's notion of memory, we find Harry Harootunian. What I want to do now is briefly summarize Harootunian's treatment of Kuki's aesthetics and prompt you to consider an alternative reading of *'Iki' no kōzō* as an effort at resistance, and not necessarily resistance of what we might expect. Kuki's Western critics see him as resisting the incursion across Japanese borders of some complex of modernity, commodity, imperialism and the West. I would argue that he is also resisting imperialist constructions of Japan as a nation. I think I can, probably against his will, enlist Harootunian as support for this argument. In *Overcome By Modernity*, Harootunian suggests that the whole of Japanese uniqueness discourse begins out of a desire to resist Western imperialism but quickly transforms itself into a justification of Japanese imperialism: "what appeared as a huge rescue operation to recall difference against the colonizing claims of the commodity form was inverted to become a discourse devoted to upholding a unique cultural identity rooted in the racial specificity of myth and the presumption of ethnic homogeneity"

(Harootunian 2000, 212-13). There is a double inversion here for Harootunian. First, whatever impulse there is to assert difference in *nihonjinron* thought is subverted by the *nihonjinron* insistence that Japan exists as one monolithic location in which any individual Japanese person exists only as a manifestation of Japaneseness, living not as a resident but as a citizen. Second, in engaging in this discourse on Japanese uniqueness, the *nihonjinron* are in fact being *more* Western (read: fascist) than Westerners; like his student Leslie Pincus, Harootunian argues that *nihonjinron* thought is grounded in a misreading of Heidegger —

> it is important to acknowledge that for Heidegger, Dasein was individualized through the act of recognizing it own finiteness in death and the constitutive role played by "resoluteness." In the hands of his Japanese followers, Being was collectivized, because it was easily identified with the Japanese folk and nation, exempted from death. (Harootunian 2000, 222)

Overcome By Modernity takes its title from the symposium on overcoming modernity mentioned in the first chapter; Harootunian's rhetorical position at least seems to be that Japan failed to overcome. In taking this stance, he burdens himself with the same conceptual framework that leads the *nihonjinron* writers he criticizes to equate Japan with premodernity and the West with modernity. What's more he suggests that where Westerners tend to individualize, the Japanese tend to collectivize and so, one problem with *nihonjinron* thought is for Harootunian, as it is for Pincus, the investing of culture, which ought to be private, with public, political meaning.

But in an earlier work, "The Problem of Taishō," Harootunian gives us some other interesting material that I want to revisit, because it allows for a slightly different interpretation of the early work done on Japanese difference. This is what he says about Kuki in particular:

> Against the social moralism which mass society made urgent, Taishō intellectuals insisted upon the isolation and self-centeredness of the aesthetic man, as revealed in Nishida Kitarō's search for pure and unmediated experience and Kuji Seizo's [sic] disclosure of style (*iki*) and sensibility as the central elements in culture. This aesthetic vision transformed what necessarily was into an ethic, and demanded a wholeness of being in which all moral clashes were contained and surpassed. The ethics of the Taishō intellectual were thus, largely, an ethics of being. (Harootunian 1974, 17)

Now this was written before the publication of Pincus's dissertation on Kuki, for which Harootunian was a supervisor, and there is here some evidence of Harootunian himself having at best a somewhat cursory interest in Kuki. Even at this point, however, we can clearly see a version of Harootunian's later claims that during the Taisho, the Japanese intellectual class contributed to a fascist transformation of aesthetics into ethics, and that the thought of the times was informed by the Japanese reading of Heidegger. However, we are also being presented with an idea I do not find repeated in Harootunian's later work on this subject, namely the suggestion that the Taisho intellectuals whose "high-minded cultural aspiration...was to defend *bunka* [culture]" (Harootunian 1974, 17) were concerned not with the isolation of the state but with the isolation of "the aesthetic man".

This refusal to take up the urgent task of social moralism is meaningful; it indicates the presence of a significant generation gap between those thinkers who came of age during the Meiji — the "heroic time" as Harootunian puts it (Harootunian 1974, 6) — and those who followed them[12]... The schism is between the ethicists and the aestheticists. In "The Problem of Taisho," Harootunian seems to me to affirm Andrew Barshay's position that the state did not collude with culture but marched upon it — "The government's

[12] This gap is evident in Harootunian's paraphrase of the way in which Taoka Reiun, a member of the pro-nationalist, anti-modernization Political Teaching Alliance, founded in 1888, articulates the problem with kids these days: "How different contemporary youth were, complained Taoka Reiun, from the *shosei kishitsu* of an earlier time, known for their 'rustic character, seriousness,' their devotion to study and hard work" (Harootunian 1974, 20).

cultural policy," Harootunian says, "had not just stripped culture of its political and social purpose, *it had robbed it of its central significance.*. In a sense the government banalized culture, narrowing its scope of neutrality to such things as pleasure, entertainment, geisha, sake, historical romance, and the love of the solitary self" (Harootunian 1974, 27, my emphasis). This version of Japan's intellectual history is, to my eye, at odds with Harootunian's later position that the state invested culture with political purpose, and certainly quite different from Pincus's argument that the fascist turn in Japanese thought arose out of an untoward intimacy between the political and cultural spheres. According to this reading, the state's cultural policy in fact sought to bracket culture, to make it into a private realm. Harootunian refers to culture's "scope of neutrality" but if he was right in suggesting that state policy functioned to take from culture its central significance by eliminating anything that might speak to political or social realities, then this "scope of neutrality" is a creation of state policy — rather than enforcing a narrowing of culture's inherent neutrality, this represents a reinvention of culture *as* a neutral field.

We must observe, of course, that the very banalized elements of culture that Harootunian identifies as being all that the state would allow — pleasure, entertainment, geisha — are the things that seemed compelling to Kuki. We've already come across Barshay's suggestion that under the circumstances of modernity, Japanese thinkers could elect either to be insiders and so have their work serve the state in some capacity or retreat into "private, aesthetic concerns." Harootunian's work suggests that there was a whole generation beating this particular retreat:

> It is interesting to note that the Japanese in the Taisho period substituted an earlier (Tokugawa-Meiji) belief in the perfectibility of the moral faculties of the individual (public) for the aesthetic perfectibility of the individual (private)... the

> improvement of all else would follow upon the transformation of the self. (Harootunian 1974, 17-18)

But I don't think we should read the escape into aesthetics as an expression of laziness or unseriousness. If the state insists that neutral culture consists only of pleasure, entertainment, geisha, then to identify those things as bearing the meaning of essential Japaneseness is neither to be in collusion with the state nor to be utterly apathetic and disinterested, but to act in opposition to the state, which has reserved for itself the right to determine what constitutes Japaneseness and how this Japaneseness is to be performed. That is to say, the Taisho interest in the autonomous, solitary self represented a counter to, and a rejection of, the hegemonic notion of the social self. Harootunian introduces this possibility when he observes that "pleasure may have served, in fact, to affirm the self against official claims demanding 'self-sacrifice, perseverance and determination' (*gashin shōtan*)[13] in the realization of national goals" (Harootunian 1974, 20). *Iki* functions in opposition to *gashin shōtan* because while it does encourage some notion of perseverance insofar as it extends its telos infinitely into the future, it resists any valuing of success, whether individual or collective.

Iki as a mode of resistance

Kuki's *iki* then relocates Japaneseness in three distinct ways, each way requiring that he select the weaker side of a power relationship. He locates Japaneseness outside of the realm of national political discourse by placing it in the *ukiyo*. He locates Japaneseness outside of the realm of national gender discourse by placing it in the feminine. And he locates Japaneseness outside of the realm of national expansionist or colonialist discourse

[13]The expression comes from the Chinese story of a prince who, taken captive by his father's murderer, chose to sleep on a bed of firewood and eat a gall-bladder every night in order to sufficiently toughen his resolve for vengeance; it has on one hand the fairly innocuous suggestion of a spirit of perseverance, or readiness to endure through thick and thin, but also connotes a willingness to put one's self through hardship for the sake of vengeance.

by placing it in the contingent. That is to say, for Kuki *iki* is Japaneseness, but Japaneseness is contingent and performative rather than eternal, organic, and natural. *Iki* then is unique in that it cannot be performed except under certain conditions, or in the absence of its formal causes; it is in this sense not reproducible outside of those conditions, and so it is original, on Benjamin's terms, and not exportable, not universal. As we will see, in identifying Japaneseness as neither universal nor eternal, Kuki positions Japaneseness in such a way as to undermine both national and transnational movements.

Kuki's emphasis on language as the location of ethnic meaning makes him look like a linguistic nationalist, but in fact his position diverges significantly from linguistic nationalism. I can think of two ways that relations between language and nations are arranged; both arrangements are consistent with what Derrida characterizes as phonocentrism, the notion that words unify thoughts and sounds in a stable way. In the first arrangement, the fact of a sound existing makes it possible for a thought to be expressed. This will mean that some thoughts are only thinkable in Japanese, and so the fact of Japanese language produces Japanese thoughts. I'll call this nationalist phonocentrism. We find a fair example of this kind of phonocentric view of Japanese language in D.T. Suzuki's dialogues with Erich Fromm — in *Zen Buddhism and Psychoanalysis*; Fromm, following Suzuki, suggests that "Generally speaking, it may be said that an experience rarely comes into awareness for which the language has no word" (Fromm 100).

In the second arrangement, the fact of a thought existing demands a certain kind of sound. This will mean that whenever one has a particular kind of thought, one has to speak it in a particular language. I'll call this internationalist phonocentrism, internationalist because in dialogue with Karatani Kōjin (and others), Derrida suggests that this arrangement can allow the severing of the relationships between language and race, language and nationality, and even language and linguistics — Fichte, for instance,

> said that to speak German had nothing to do with the ability, the competence of the linguistic subject. The man who thinks and understands my own philosophy, even if he speaks Italian or French, he speaks *Deutsch*.. And similarly a German subject who speaks German perfectly, but doesn't understand Fichte's philosophy doesn't belong to our *Geschlecht*, is not *deutsch*. (Karatani and Derrida)

This is some of Derrida's response to Karatani's critique of Derrida's *Of Grammatology* which Karatani builds partly on the foundation he lays out in "Non-Cartesian Cogito or Cogito as Difference" with reference to the Japanese linguist Tokieda Motoki. Karatani's argument is that Tokieda, because he "had an understanding of the multilingual situation" that lead him to reject the Saussurean conception of Japanese as *langue*, "the abstract total system of a language at a given moment in its history" (Karatani and Derrida) — language, in other words, as belonging not to people but to races or nations (Saussure 19) — sought to sever the connection between the Japanese language and the Japanese state, and for this reason should not be considered an imperialist, because while Tokieda did seek the establishment of Japanese as the dominant East Asian language, this did not indicate a parallel interest in the establishment of Japan as the dominant East Asian state.

Derrida disagrees with Karatani on this point. His assertion is that just as Fichte's understanding of *deutsch* was imperialist — "When he says, for instance, that even a Frenchman or an Italian who thinks the way I do is *deutsch*, that is imperialism, not simply nationalism" — Tokieda's phonocentrism can be taken to "represent a sort of hyper-nationalism or imperialist nationalism" (Karatani and Derrida). The important point for me here is the argument Derrida makes explicating how it is that an impulse toward universals is not necessarily

> incompatible with nationalism. That's a complication of the concept of nationalism: it is compatible sometimes, when it's through the scheme of exemplarity, with cosmopolitanism and internationalism and universalism... Because of the exemplary structure of nationalism — the fact that nationalism

> wants to be exemplary, that is, to serve as a model for the universe — it may be at the same time universal, exemplary, *and* imperialistic. (Karatani and Derrida)

Etienne Balibar characterizes this coming together of humanist internationalism and racist nationalism in terms of Wilhelm Reich's "nationalist internationalism" (Balibar and Wallerstein 62); it is a nationalism based in race struggle that seeks "to establish for all time each nation's status and place in the hierarchy of nations, thus enabling nationalism to fuse specifically national and social conservative elements" (Balibar and Wallerstein 63). History's big answer to nationalist internationalism was international nationalism in the form of Marxist class struggle; this is the kind of approach that the progressive New Buddhists would take. Kuki does something else, something which is neither a nationalism nor an internationalism.

Although the claim for *iki* as a unique Japanese modality is based in a claim about language that looks something like the passage from Fromm quoted above — "The fact that there is no word-form in the West corresponding to *iki* is proof that in Western culture *iki* as a phenomenon of consciousness has no definite significance to its ethnic being" (Kuki 1997 120) — for Kuki this word, *iki*, is in some sense a contingent sign: what it points to is not a homogenous essence but a possibility; Kuki gives the word multiple etymologies, and when it appears in the text, it is always in quotes that indicate its status as sign rather than as a thing itself — a stable word. That is, for Kuki the relation in *iki* between the sign ('iki') and what it may signify (breath; life; vividness; force; going; particulars) is an oscillating, unstable relation. This kind of proto-deconstructive attitude is informed in part by his use of Roscellinus; it's through Roscellinus that Kuki gets at the idea that universals are just *flatus vocis*, vocal sounds or puffs of air (Kuki 1997, 120) —

"what are called general ideas are only names, mere verbal designations, serving as labels for a collection of things or a series of particular events" (De Wulf).

What this means is that we cannot treat *iki* at the level of idea — it is not part of the Japanese *langue*. Rather it has existence only as it is enacted, or performed, as *parole*. This is why Kuki urges the reader to resist the lure of universals:

> Where we encounter such illusion we must recall 'all that our spirit has seen' in its concrete and true appearance. This recollection is then nothing but the horizon which makes us interpretatively reperceive that *iki* is ours... We must, on this point, dare a reverse transformation of Plato's epistemology.
> (Kuki 1997, 120-121)

The recollection Kuki describes here is an *anamnesis* (Kuki 1997, 121), a memory of something already known to the self (Plato 56), but in arguing for a reversal of Plato's epistemology, Kuki reverses Plato's understanding of *anamnesis*; it is not that the enacted is an imperfect rendering of a remembered perfect form, but that the form is an imperfect rendering of remembered performance. Because in this understanding he unequivocally rejects the universal in favour of the actual, we must see Kuki's understanding of history as parallel to, though obviously in no sense derived from, Walter Benjamin's. His critics take Kuki to task for locating Japaneseness in a world that was almost entirely vanished at the time of his writing — this choice is characterized as that of an elitist, a snob, and on one occasion that of an idiot — but for Kuki, as for Benjamin, history is not a rendering of the past but a provocation enabling the past to rise up, disrupting progressive historical time — "History" says Benjamin, "is the subject of a structure whose site is not homogenous, empty time, but time filled by the presence of the now [*Jetztzeit*]... Fashion has a flair for the topical, no matter where it stirs in the thickets of long ago; it is a tiger's leap into the past" (Benjamin 261). Benjamin characterizes the potential for the present to contain

within it at once the past and the future as humanity's "weak Messianic power" (Benjamin 254). Nishitani calls this synchronic time "the home-ground of the present... where time and eternity intersect" (Nishitani 1982, 270). For Kuki, I believe, *iki* is a performance of this kind of time, insofar it is a performance of the presencing of the now. It is in *iki* that the progressive expansion, and progressive unravelling, of Japan is held back; it is in the performance of *iki* that he commits himself "To nothing less than not consigning our spiritual culture to oblivion. There is nothing but to go on bearing an ardent Eros for our idealistic and a-realistic culture" (Kuki 1997, 121). This attitude toward Japanese culture mimics the *iki* attitude in that it forestalls completion, and so permits the possibility of Japan as destiny to exist only in the contingency of the present, where it is always on the verge of passing away. His selection of Edo as a location comes into focus now as a meaningful choice as a vanishing Japan, trembling "on the edge of dissolution, but never [moving] completely to the side of disappearance (or appearance)" (Ivy 242).

Karatani and Derrida were brought together, to discuss each other, in the context of a symposium on the new imperialism of the English language; Derrida, at this time,

> proposed that the current resurrection of nationalism in new forms is actually a defensive reaction against American capitalism, together with a reaction against technology, tele-technology, and all things which exert the power of delocalization — the power, that is, of dissociating group or nation from place and from the practice of its idiom. (Becker-Lerone in Karatani and Derrida)

Kuki's aesthetics is a nationalism in this sense; it is clearly constructed in order to resist technology, tele-technology, and delocalization. But it is then an idiomatic nationalism, not based in the notion of nation as universal exemplar but in an understanding of Japaneseness as an idiom: particular to its own location, having a meaning that cannot be understood simply through an analysis of its constitutive parts. It thus resists the

universalizing movements of imperialist nationalism/internationalism by privileging location against state. It is also almost literally idiotic, insofar as it is *idios*, private, belonging to the self alone. Through this retreat into interiority, it likewise undermines phonocentric understandings of the nation by requiring that Japaneseness be performed. That is to say, while Kuki does in some Benjaminian way suggest that memory can rupture time in such a way as to produce an experience of a *Jetztzeit*, he does not seem to me to suggest that this memory is therefore more real than the real; memory has always to be enacted, to be performed, in order to preserve Japaneseness as a possibility. The presencing of Japaneseness then has to happen in the contingent now rather than the eternal past/future; in this sense we can understand Japaneseness as a happy accident. This understanding of the nation as contingent rather than eternal places nationality at the level of word and not grammar — the relation, Kuki says, "between meaning and language and the self-conscious being of a People is not... one where the former assembles and constitutes the latter, but one where the living being of the people creates meaning and language" (Kuki 1997, 28). As a nationalist aesthetics then, Kuki's provides the continual directive to live Japaneseness, but it does not posit some Japaneseness existing discretely outside of the fact of living. In rejecting this monolithic ideal Japan, Kuki's aesthetics undermine the paradoxical universalizing movement of a truly imperialist nationalism.

CONCLUSION

It's for this reason, finally, that I think we can legitimately characterize the detachment of *iki* as an eremitic detachment: for Kuki, the Japanese self exists not at the level of the ideal but as a narrative unfolding in the present, a narrative of memory that preserves the memory by enacting it. Harpham tells us that "the eremite courted temptation in order to achieve the sharpest possible definition of himself" (Harpham 28); *iki* too consists in a courting of temptation twinned with the constant refusal that constitutes its intensional tension and produces identity. Even if Light's distinction between the eremite and the *flaneur* is more than anything a distinction between religious and secular aestheticisms, I think it is nonetheless correct to identify the detachment of *iki* as a secular aestheticism that draws heavily on religious thought to construct itself. Following Marra, I would argue that the distinction between religious and secular is unclear in aesthetics at any rate — there will be the trace of religion in any well-developed modern aesthetics, and certainly it is present in Baudelaire's dandyism. Both the eremite and the *flâneur* take as their project the memorializing of the self; in its context, *iki*'s emphasis on this memorializing of the particular, bringing the individual into focus by positioning her against the state, constitutes not only a development of an indigenous religious discourse, but a deployment of that discourse against national concerns.

Karatani's equivocation as to whether Kuki represents a retreat into interiority or a totalizing of exteriority reveals, I think, the degree to which an aesthetics of *iki* as Kuki describes in fact arises out a simultaneous exaggeration of the interior and the exterior, so that the performing subject is stranded between advancing and withdrawing. To put *iki* in service to a discourse of colonial overcoming or conquest, as Kuki arguably does later in

his career, requires a slackening of the tension between advancing and withdrawing, but if *iki* is itself this tension, then it vanishes in the slackening. Taken as described in *'Iki' no kōzō*, *iki* is an aesthetic totally unsuited to the purposes of fascist nationalism; it refuses modes of overcoming and conquest and attempts to sustain a posture that denies the progressive forward movement of history, even where that movement is characterized as a return to the eternal past. Whether this posture is in fact sustainable is debatable, but in reading *'Iki' no kōzō* as a work that defines Japan against the West, Dale, Pincus, and Harootunian mistake the posture of *iki* as a simple contraction into Japaneseness, understood as the premodern, the organic, the eternal, the hidden. I propose instead an understanding of the posture of *iki* as one in which Japan takes both sides of the usual binaries: the tensions Kuki is concerned with are between the modern and the premodern, the artificial and the organic, the contingent and the eternal, the revealed and the hidden, and this tension is what pulls the surface of things into the form of Japaneseness. Like anything in which the interior and exteriors are in tension, *iki* is fragile, fleeting, and liable to, heroically, burst.

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