"From Everyday Life to Print: On the Production of Two Genres of Text in Modern Japan"

Jordan Sand

From Everyday Life to Print:

On the Production of Two Genres of Text in Modern Japan

Jordan Sand

Georgetown University

When literary scholars began to think seriously about the production and distribution of texts as material forms (as in the work of Roger Chartier and of Maeda Ai), the new focus entailed a quantum leap in the scale of the enterprise of literary scholarship: a leap, of course, toward incorporating social and cultural history. Now you are asked to be concerned not only with how authors think and express themselves, but how ideas, having achieved linguistic expression, then physically reach the awareness of readers—how readers encounter and interact with the text, or form communities around texts. Yet in a sense this has only pushed the boundaries of the problem in one direction. To encompass the whole process of textual production, one would equally have to push backward from the moment of writing toward that chimerical origin of the literary idea, when expression is extracted from or somehow inspired or instantiated by events and sensations in the chaotic totality of life. This may at first seem merely a return to the oldest task of literary analysis, that is, divining the author's "true intent"; but I mean something different. Here I will present two genres of text with important and distinctive features in modern Japanese that bring to light this problem of the movement from life to text.

Modern Japanese literary studies seem to have inherited the Western romantic conception of the individual author. Asked to conjure to mind the site of authorship, we probably think of the lone writer in his study (or perhaps at a *ryokan* or *bessō* somewhere) with sheets of *genkō yōshi*. The plates at the front of *zenshū* reproduce this image with the obligatory photographs of the author in his study and the manuscript on *genkō yōshi* filled with crossings-out and writings-in. Authorship seems to be constituted by this architectural interior for solitary occupancy and this trace of the brush or the pen in and around rows of little boxes. Yet such a conception of the modern author renders many types of literary texts invisible.[1]

The two genres I'm going to illustrate are not conventionally spoken of in Japan as literary genres, but it is not hard to demonstrate that they constitute historical lineages of writing with distinct traits. The two are: 1) non-professional personal histories (generically called "*seikatsu kiroku*" or "*seikatsu tsuzurikata*," but encompassing a range of subgenres from *shaseibun* to *jibunshi*). 2) graphic compendia of everyday life, the most remarkable and famous of which is probably Kon Wajiro's *Kōgengaku moderunorojio* (Modernology)—but other examples range from the Bunka-Bunsei period comparison of Edo and Osaka manners and

---

[1] On writers' studies, see Kōno Kensuke, *Shomotsu no kindai* (Chikuma shobo, 1999), pp. 79-112.

customs, *Morisada mankō* (also called *Kinsei fūzokushi*), to some of the recent photographic books of Araki Nobuyoshi. A quick survey of texts in these two genres, one of which draws from vocal expression and the other from visual experience, brings attention to the ways that the stuff of life gets made into print. In this sense, I am talking about the textualization of the material world rather than the materialization of texts.

To think about this textualization process, we might imagine a simple linear sequence:

Life→perception and emotional response→expression (thought rendered into text)→ print→distribution and consumption.

This schema, tied to the romantic model of authorship, is apt to be imagined as a bell curve with its climax at the moment of transition from emotion to expression. Retracing the curve back from the printed text in pursuit of that climactic moment leads the mind into a vain effort to reconstruct an instant of genius that presumably took place in the author's study. As a by-product of this line of thought, we get the fetishization of crossings-out and pennings-in on the *genkō yōshi* that is characteristic of much of the traditional scholarship on individual authors, further manifested graphically in the photographs at the front of *zenshū*.

Writers—or text producers—in the genres I am speaking of here aspire to a different schema, which might be sketched like this:

Life→embodied perception→recording (as close as possible to a "real-time," spontaneous notation)→print→distribution and consumption.

Of course, neither of these is more than the crudest schematic chronology of events that tend actually to happen in far more complex and irregular ways. For example, these schemas fail to account for the editing process after submission of the manuscript. As anyone who has gone back and forth with an editor about a particular sentence or paragraph knows, this stage often involves multiple doublings-back along the linear track I have put forth here. This complicating factor is yet more profound in the Japanese context because editors and publishers have played a remarkably proactive role in Japanese print production. The editor or publisher's role may actually extend back to the text's inception in life. An editor is often present from the beginning, not merely as a facilitator but as something almost like a movie director, treating authors as the director does actors. The serial newspaper novel is an obvious example: here the author does not toil in isolation for long, because he or she is constantly being dunned for the next installment (which has to fit into a precisely limited slot created for it by the newspaper editors).[2]

In the non-fictional realm, one thing Japanese editors are always interested in is fresh information (*nama no jōhō*). Fresh information is a good reason to have someone or some group of people put together a book. And this assembling, amassing role of the publishing project contributes to the avalanche of printed words that has poured from Japanese publishing houses every year since the late Meiji period. I have a friend—a very good journalist and non-fiction

---

[2] On the role of editors dealing with fiction authors, see Sari Kawana, "Incompetent Authors and Efficient Editors: Behind the Scenes of Modern Japanese Literature," paper presented at the symposium, "The Past and Future of the Book: Transition and Translation in Japanese Publishing Culture," Columbia University, October 27th, 2006.

writer—who published seven books last year. I am sure that all of them were solicited, extracted from her, by eager publishers, who wanted books with her name on the cover and said, I saw you did a short piece on *x*, how about you compile everything you've got on *x*? And when they managed to compel her to write much of it truly "*nama*," then the book would get an *obi* with that bold claim "*kakioroshi*": "written and dropped" (like an ink painting done in a single brushstroke)—which is to say delivered to the editors fresh rather than cobbled together from leftovers.

Why this craving for the *nama* in print? I don't have a ready answer. Perhaps it is related to the nature of the Japanese language and the illusion it creates of unmediated communication, as Edward Fowler has discussed it.[3] I suspect it has at least as much to do with the structure of modern Japanese publishing, however, and the expectations it has engendered in the mass reading public. Since the revolution in publishing brought about by the Hakubunkan company in the 1880s and 1890s, print in Japan has been cheap and mass-produced.[4] Already accustomed to casual reading before the age of mass print, Japanese readers easily became enthusiastic book buyers and collectors. Publishers have scrambled ever since to come up with the next new thing, and practically any information—or pseudo-information—has the potential to sell.

Let me return to my two non-fictional genres. These are both cases in which the writers actively pursued the goal of capturing something fresh from life not just as a strategy for print sales but as a philosophy of intellectual engagement with the world. Since I am bundling together a range of disparate texts rather casually here for the sake of argument, the theoretical analysis I can offer of each is limited. But in the tradition of many Japanese non-fiction writers, I hope that some "fresh information" will compensate for this analytic superficiality.

Writing Life (Seikatsu Tsuzurikata)

The idea of a genre of writing that simply records daily life posits a *seikatsusha*, the protagonist of daily life, whose primary occupation is not writing. This person who does not write must be given the means to write and assisted, cajoled, or otherwise made to write. The genre is thus founded not on ordinary individuals writing their lives but on relationships between ordinary individuals and facilitating intellectuals: between the teacher and pupil, the literary editor and the amateur writer submitting work to a periodical, the political activist and the member of a writing circle (or some other type of *saakuru*), or the extension officer and the farm villager. The teachers and editors typically then collect the best *seikatsu* writing and publish anthologies. (We can see a generally similar pattern of guidance, evaluation and compilation in *tanka* and *haiku* clubs).

The lineage of this genre of daily-life writing extends from "free composition" (*sakubun*) and written "sketches from life" (*shaseibun*) in the Meiji schools to "writing from life" (*seikatsu tsuzurikata*) both in the schools and outside them in the 1920's and 1930s, to the postwar

---

[3] Fowler, *Rhetoric of Confession: Shishōsetsu in Early Twentieth-Century Japanese Fiction* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), pp. 28-42.

[4] On Hakubunkan and the Meiji publishing revolution, see Giles Martial Richter, "Marketing the word: Publishing entrepreneurs in Meiji Japan, 1870-1912," PhD dissertation, Columbia University, 1999.

seikatsu tsuzurikata or *seikatsu kiroku* (daily life record) movement and finally to the post-1970's phenomenon of the self-history, or *jibunshi*. These were all distinct movements, but there are clear family affinities between them, and each was conscious of its precursors. All sought the freshness of the unmediated voice for a literature untainted by the influence of canonical literature. Equally important, many of the promoters of these movements saw their work in ethical terms as a form of populist social revolution, and saw the creation of individual works as journeys of self-discovery through vocalization. We might call the motive force of this genre "ethnovocalism" to describe the ethnographic focus on recording daily life combined with the advocates' exaltation of spontaneous speech acts and their experimentation with techniques to bring writing closer to the moment of utterance.

If, in the spirit of Yanagita Kunio, we discard the hierarchical distinctions among producers of literature that the academy and members of the literary establishment have used to maintain their places of privilege, the ethnovocalism of *seikatsu tsuzurikata* emerges as a parallel second lineage of Japanese naturalistic self-narration alongside that of the *shishōsetsu*. In contrast with the naturalism of troubled men alone in their studies, the production of ethnovocal literature involves interaction of some kind, particularly between teachers/editors/circle-organizers and speakers/writers. Ethnovocalist teachers and movement leaders have actually tended to go further, asserting an alternative, inverted hierarchy in which the non-literary holds a superior place to *bundan* literature. Having children write is one way to get closer to a non-literary voice. Writing in collaboration or conversation with or among non-writers is another. In the game of authentic voice production, the child trumps the adult, the writer with less formal education trumps the educated writer, the poor person trumps the rich, and the farmer trumps the urbanite.

At the same time that free composition was introduced in primary schools, journals like *Hototogisu*, with its connections to the *genbun itchi* movement, began soliciting sketches from life (*shaseibun*). Takahashi Osamu has observed that the "free composition" is simultaneously a didactic situation and a site of individual subjectivity. Masaoka Shiki began a column in *Hototogisu* in 1900 soliciting diaries from readers, calling for writing what one experienced "just as it is" (*arinomama*). School composition guides used the same term. In both instances, young writers were instructed to write only about things experienced on the day of writing. But the editors of *Hototogisu* selected, edited and rewrote the compositions they received to make them more interesting for journal readers. *Arinomama* was thus more a "schema" (*kōseitai*) than a reality, Takahashi notes.[5]

Yanagita Kunio later recalled that the rural diaries in *Hototogisu* surprised urban readers with views of a world unfamiliar to them. Yanagita's interest in expanding the category of literature, and particularly in orality, are well-known, although he also wrote against the *genbun itchi* movement.[6] In *Min'yō oboegaki*, he proposed that both literature (*bungaku*) and humming

---

[5] Takahashi Osamu, "Sakubun kyōiku no diskūru: 'nichijō' no hakken to shaseibun," in Komori Yōichi, Kōno Kensuke, Takahashi Osamu, et al, *Media, hyōshō, ideorogii: Meiji sanjū nendai no bunka kenkyū* (Ozawa shoten, 1997), p. 273.

[6] Marilyn Ivy, *Discourses of the Vanishing: Modernity, Phantasm, Japan* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1995), pp. 78-9.

(*hanauta*) were residual memories of songs from the earliest period of human vocal expression.[7] Just as cowherds in the West developed the pastoral song while watching their flocks, Japanese sang of the young grasses and the voices of birds in the spring. Like other animals, he claimed, humans sang originally for love.[8] Thus Yanagita believed that all expressions of the voice, whether directed toward the gods or toward cows should be thought of as genres of literary art. In proper homage to Yanagita's ecumenical conception of literature, the new *Yanagita zenshū*, which began publication in 1997 and is still in progress, includes every textual trace that may be associated with Yanagita as writer and speaker, reframing Yanagita's own authorship as a position in a web of letters and vocal expressions rather than the solitary engagement of genius and *genkō yōshi*. (Relatedly, Yanagita's early writings were initially all privately printed, so we should be clear that publishing does not always and instantly mean mass distribution.)

The term *tsuzurikata* was adopted by the *seikatsu tsuzurikata* writing movement in the 1930's, first in the schools and subsequently outside them. Its source was a unit in the national curriculum for the primary schools established in 1900. *Tsuzurikata* in its original context referred to "composition" but in a narrow sense that in the eyes of most Education Ministry bureaucrats probably meant something closer to "spelling" or even "penmanship." Leftist teachers essentially coopted this portion of the curriculum as the only place available to introduce something different from what was mandated from above—*tsuzurikata* classes were "an airhole," one of its proponents later admitted.[9] The course itself was absorbed into *kokugo* in 1940 (coinciding with the arrest of a number of the more outspoken teachers in the movement, which thereby plugged the airhole), then replaced by *sakubun* in the postwar years. In hindsight today it seems safe to say that the wartime crackdown on *tsuzurikata* teachers who urged their pupils to write of their everyday lives was driven less by anxiety on the part of the authorities about what would result from the exercise of recording everyday life itself than by the openly anti-government position of the teachers, whose writings encouraged the view of *seikatsu tsuzurikata* as a form of proletarian literature, part of the formation of a revolutionary class consciousness.[10] Recent scholars have pointed out that at least outside the classroom, children continued to be encouraged to write compositions about their daily lives even after the arrests. Competitions during the war years resulted in anthologies of writing by children describing life in Manchuria, for example.[11]

---

[7] Yanagita Kunio, "Min'yō oboegaki," in *Yanagita Kunio zenshū* 11 (Chikuma shobo, 1997), p. 48.

[8] "Min'yō oboegaki," pp. 43-4.

[9] Kokubu Ichitarō, *Atarashii tsuzurikata kyōshitsu* (Nihon hyoronsha, 1951), p. 13.

[10] For an account of the government suppression of the *seikatsu tsuzurikata* movement by one of its victims, see Kokubu Ichitarō, *Shōgaku kyōshitachi no yūzai* (Misuzu shobo, 1984). Kokubu mentions the following three journal among those affected: *Tsuzurikata seikatsu* (est. 1930), *Hoppō kyōiku* (est. 1934), and *Seikatsu gakkō* (est.1935). Kokubu, 1984, p. 275.

[11] Kawamura Minato, cited in Nakaya Izumi, "'Tsuzurikata' no keisei: Toyoda Masako, *Tsuzurikata kyōshitsu* o megutte," *Gobun* 111 (December, 2001), pp. 53-4, footnote 43. After I presented this paper at the 2005 AJLS, Kōno Kensuke introduced me to the excellent research of Nakaya Izumi on Toyoda Masako and *seikatsu tsuzurikata*. This revised essay has profited considerably from Nakaya's work. My thanks to both of them.

The most famous publication associated with the movement in the 1930s was the least politically radical: the children's literature magazine *Akai tori* (Red Bird), under the editorship of Suzuki Miekichi. Suzuki's own stories and the stories he selected for *Akai tori* featured innocent yet introspective children, in sharp contrast with the heroic young protagonists of most popular literature for children published at the time. *Akai tori* published the compositions sent in by children or their teachers together with Suzuki's comments. The journal thus extended the classroom situation. The editor did not simply stand in the place of the teacher addressing composition pupils, however. Probably too sophisticated to have been appreciated by the young writers themselves, Suzuki's comments provided models for teachers within the movement while at the same time constituting a kind of literary critique of "child-produced art." *Akai tori* thus instructed children at the same time that it bracketed them as privileged authors of a distinct literary genre.[12]

Enter Toyoda Masako

Between the 1930's and the 1970's, daily-life writing moved from the classroom to gatherings of adults, and from a form of proletarian literature eventually to a mass-market commodity in the self-realization industry, like quilting or *eikaiwa* classes. Along the way, however, one remarkable and celebrated literary incident occurred. In September, 1937, Chūō kōronsha published the innocuously titled *Tsuzurikata kyōshitsu* ("Composition Class"), the first half of which comprised ten pieces written for class by Tokyo schoolgirl Toyoda Masako roughly from the time she was twelve until she was fifteen, together with the comments of her teacher. Toyoda came from a poor and troubled working-class *shitamachi* household. Faithfully following her teacher's directions, she wrote sketches of this unpretty domestic scene. Her writing talent quickly became evident, and several pieces appeared in *Akai tori*. In March, 1938, Toyoda's stories were adapted for the stage at the Tsukiji Little Theater. Responding to the play's popularity, newspapers ran profiles of Toyoda herself. Her child's-eye depictions of *shitamachi* poverty captured the imagination of the mass public. The first volume of *Tsuzurikata kyōshitsu* was in its 71st edition when a sequel was published in December, 1938. Earlier that same year, Tōhō had released a film version of *Tsuzurikata kyōshitsu*, starring Takamine Hideko and directed by Yamamoto Yoshijirō with the young assistant director Kurosawa Akira.

The original volume of Toyoda's pieces, published, of course, without any inkling of the popular sensation it would create, was packaged as a manual for teachers, with an introduction by Toyoda's *tsuzurikata* instructor, Ōki Ken'ichirō. The second half of the book was taken up by a theoretical discussion of *tsuzurikata* guidance by another member of the profession. Toyoda's name appeared nowhere on the title page. By the time of the sequel, the theater and film productions had established her fame. Now the cover bore her name alone, although Ōki was credited as editor on the title page, and still appears to have selected the pieces, which were ordered by the age at which Toyoda wrote them. The title *Zoku tsuzurikata kyōshitsu*, which, like the title of the first volume, is unlikely to have been chosen by Toyoda herself, now

---

[12] Mark Jones, personal communication.

referenced *Tsuzurikata kyōshitsu* as a known literary work: through popularization, the phrase "Composition Class" had accidentally broken free of its moorings in the actual schoolroom.[13]

The comments of Ōki and Suzuki Miekichi included in the two volumes praised Toyoda for her plain and unaffected prose and her ability to express things just as she saw them. Certainly, this provided a model for aspiring young writers and their teachers. But Ōki probably came closer to identifying how a collection of compositions by a grade-school pupil had become a bestseller when he called *Tsuzurikata kyōshitsu* a "naked record of everyday life" (*sekirara no seikatsu kiroku*).[14] As Toyoda presented her gritty, semi-dysfunctional family struggling to make ends meet, squandering money on liquor, fighting with one another, and speaking in vulgar curse-ridden slang, the ethnographic bordered on the graphic in the prurient sense; the *nama* became *namanamashii*. In an afterword to the sequel, Ōki alluded to pieces Toyoda had written about her parents' world that were too "raw" to be published at the time, and expressed the hope that circumstances would permit publication later. This would appear to refer to writing added to the 1951 *bunko* edition under the title "Kanashiki kiroku" (Sad Record), in which Toyoda wrote of her mother's adultery and her father's abject breakdown in front of Ōki himself. Although audiences thus did not learn the juiciest bits until after the war, glimpsing the sordid way that "the other half" lived—and sensing the possibility that more lay hidden beyond where a child could go—doubtless provided many readers a voyeuristic frisson. This illicit pleasure was given moral sanction by the fact of Toyoda's own unimpeachable "purity" (an ambiguous term often applied to her prose in what might be considered a euphemistic displacement), her uncomplaining acceptance of a difficult life, and her apparent presentation of it *arinomama*, just as it was. As Nakaya Izumi has demonstrated, the inspiring narrative of a pure-hearted girl stoically coping with a difficult life had appeal and ideological utility in an era of total war as well as in the project of national recovery afterward.[15]

For intellectuals, Toyoda's writing succeeded because it seemed so authentic: it offered a "harsher naturalism" than the navel-watching "self-indulgence" of a Tokuda Shūsei or Tayama Katai, as Tsurumi Shunsuke observed in 1956.[16] That such writing could come from someone of Toyoda's age and sex seemed to further validate naturalist ideals, for it implied (in the minds of male intellectuals, at least) that the "pure" untutored voice would speak of life spontaneously in this earnest and boldly expository manner. Reviewing *Tsuzurikata kyōshitsu* in 1938, Kawabata Yasunari gave Toyoda the aura of a noble savage bearing lessons for the civilized: "[Her writing] seems to present literature perfectly in its original form or at its point of departure. In this sense, it is august and sacred. I expect that all authors, no matter how experienced, will find things to

---

[13] Nakaya, "'Tsuzurikata' no keisei,"pp. 44-45.

[14] Ōki Ken'ichirō, "Atogaki," in *Zoku tsuzurikata kyōshitsu* by Toyoda Masako, edited by Ōki Ken'ichirō (Chūō kōronsha, 1939), p. 2.

[15] Nakaya, "'Tsuzurikata' no keisei," pp. 48-49.

[16] Kuno Osamu and Tsurumi Shunsuke, *Gendai Nihon no shiso* (Iwanami shinsho, 1956), p. 91.

reflect on regarding their own writing when encountering this child's work, and may feel they can not equal it. This is because they will see the font at the origin of literature here."[17]

In retrospect, Toyoda's success seems to have engendered a paradox for the project of writing from life. For advocates who sought to pose amateur records of daily life against the elite tradition of *bundan* literature, it was vital to maintain the distinction between the two. Yet the popular reception of *Tsuzurikata kyōshitsu* revealed that in the end no clear line could in fact be drawn. Reading Toyoda's sketches, we can see her increasing mastery of rendering physical detail, dialect, and even sounds like her father's broken sobs with all the skill of a naturalist novelist. Novelists were professionals in the business of writing; from the perspective of *tsuzurikata* advocates, however much honesty or self-exposé went into a novel, the novelist's voice could not be as authentic as the voice of the non-professional. If the novel (*shōsetsu*) was a narrative made as a commodity (and incidentally in Japan often commissioned by an editor), the "composition" (*tsuzurikata*) was a narrative made as an ethnographic artifact (commissioned by a schoolteacher or another intellectual). When the *tsuzurikata* narrative seemed raw (*nama*), it gained value for its unconscious authenticity. Yet the techniques of evoking rawness had to come from somewhere. Even the most innocent child writer still occupied the same milieu of modern writing as the novelist, coached by teachers in this milieu and read by a public whose sensibilities were shaped by it. Literacy cannot be separated from literature. The problem would arise repeatedly, although not usually in such extreme form as Toyoda's case posed it.

Postwar *Tsuzurikata* and the "Toyoda Masako Problem"

Seikatsu tsuzurikata reemerged after the war as a movement involving gatherings of non-professional adult writers outside the classroom. Intellectuals in the group that published the journal *Shisō no kagaku* ("Science of Thought"), including Tsurumi Shunsuke and his sister Tsurumi Kazuko, led the way. The first meetings of this kind took place in a temple in Kyoto in the early 1950's.[18] According to the accounts of Tsurumi Kazuko and others, multiple narrators, both speaking and writing, were present in the place of narration together with the intellectual leaders, who then edited their narratives for publication in the journal or in anthologies. The group began with biographies of ordinary people, then moved to group portraits. The gatherings had the pronounced air of a consciousness-raising group.

Kazuko continued the same work with groups of women in farm villages and a textile factory, but focused on having the women do the writing themselves then read aloud to one another. The kind of narration she sought in these groups was supposed to convey life experience and feeling as it was—that ubiquitous and appealing phrase *arinomama*—and in the language of everyday speech (*shabette iru no to onaji kotoba*).[19] Tsurumi asserted that *seikatsu tsuzurikata* or *kiroku* distinguished itself from what was commonly called literature both in who

---

[17] Kawabata Yasunari, "Seikō shita sō kyōiku," reprinted in *Zoku tsuzurikata kyōshitsu*, back matter.

[18] Tada Michitarō, "Taninshi o yomu koto," *Shisō no kagaku* 76 (May, 86), pp. 79-80.

[19] Tsurumi Kazuko, "Shufu to musume no seikatsu kiroku" (1953); reprinted in *Seikatsu kiroku undō no naka de* (Miraisha, 1963), p. 46. To stress the closeness of *seikatsu kiroku* language to speech, Tsurumi renders the word "kotoba*"* in *katakana*, a device that highlights the term and asks the reader to vocalize it.

practiced it and in the way it was pursued. It was written by *seikatsusha* unaware of the agreed forms of expression in "literature." This would liberate them to reveal a new literature, she proposed, one closer to the lives of most Japanese. It was a group project, and therefore a way to give direction for activism rather than a substitute for action (this characterization was a thinly veiled criticism of writers who were not political activists). And it was a means of self-improvement.[20] In sum, Tsurumi's *seikatsu kiroku* sought to embody the authentic voice, but it was a voice nurtured within and shared by the group—or the fusing of multiple voices—and the process of giving voice and recording it in writing was autoteleological, not directed toward a literary audience or a market *out there*, hence its siting in the *saakuru*: composition by a circle, contained within the circle.

Although praise from Tsurumi Shunsuke played a key role in reviving interest in Toyoda Masako among postwar intellectuals, Tsurumi Kazuko's writings from the front lines of *seikatsu tsuzurikata* in the 1950s do not mention Toyoda's wartime bestseller. The apparent omission seems itself an articulate comment. We may read the reading group and oral history approaches taken by the postwar movement as in some sense a reaction to the "Toyoda Masako problem": assign a non-writer with a literary flair to express her own everyday experience directly in writing and you get a naturalist novel, which then, potentially, wins fame as literature. Reining things in around the group setting and direct vocalization helped avoid the literary trap. The literary genius that won Toyoda mass-market publication and fame had made her a sacred icon for intellectuals but it disqualified her as a model for the life-writers under their tutelage. One could admire Toyoda the *tsuzurikata* virtuoso yet assert, as one *tsuzurikata* teacher put it, that "Toyoda Masako's *tsuzurikata*" was no longer "a question for *'tsuzurikata'*" (that is, for life-writing as a movement).[21] Quite apart from the question of whether she was an innate literary genius or had been tainted by the writing of others, the fact was that the Toyoda model of success measured in terms of commodification and celebrity was precisely what *seikatsu kiroku* activists opposed. The problem that the Toyoda incident presented, at least implicitly, was how to have people produce unaffected writing free of influence not only from elite *bundan* literature but from the public appetite for unaffected writing.[22]

Movement leaders hoping for the birth of a new literature as well as a "rebirth" for the participating writers assumed their own centrality as midwives. This put their ideals in potential tension with the ambitions of their adult pupils. Kokubu Ichitarō, a central figure in radical *tsuzurikata* since the 1930s, counseled writers in 1955 against "looking restlessly" (*me o kyorokyoro shite*) in the direction of *bungaku* as soon as they had learned to write.[23] His comments appeared, however, in a journal called *Shin Nihon bungaku*. The guest editor of *Shinshū no seikatsu zakki*, a compilation of essays submitted to the regional *Shinano mainichi*

---

[20] Tsurumi Kazuko, "Shufu to musume no seikatsu kiroku," pp. 46-48.

[21] quoted in Nakaya, "'Tsuzurikata' no keisei," p. 51.

[22] For discussion of the problem of boundaries between amateur and professional writing within the movement, see Nakaya Izumi, "Puroretaria no musume, Toyoda Masako:1950 nen no 'kaku' ba o megutte," *Nihon kindai bungaku* dai 68 shū (May, 2003), pp. 86-7.

[23] Quoted in Nakaya, "Puroretaria no musume," p. 86.

newspaper, warned writers to avoid "novelistic style," making their essays more like "a diary, a household account book, or a report to the agricultural association." A new literature would emerge from that, he insisted.[24] The implication was: We, the editors, will recognize when that new literature has emerged, although you, as *seikatsusha*, may be unaware that you have given birth to it. We can imagine the aspiring Shinano writer reading this and thinking "Thanks for nothing. *You* write the report for the agricultural association; *I* want to write a novel!" This editor's entreaties are unlikely, at any rate, to have had very great effect on the writers of everyday life he wished to nurture, since his relationship to them lacked the element of directness (or of surveillance) present in the encounter in a classroom or a writing circle. A writer submitting an essay to the *seikatsu* column of a provincial newspaper, however naïve and genuine a *seikatsusha* she or he may have been, was still a solitary author alone with pen and *genkō yōshi*.

While the movement struggled with the problem of getting people to write without transforming them into *writers*, the ideal of recording daily life as a tool of social revolution among the mass of ordinary Japanese also brought to light the opposite problem, which was that the supposedly "ordinary Japanese" who came to *seikatsu kiroku* groups were people predisposed to try their hands at writing, whereas the majority continued not to write. Ōmura Ryō sparked debate in the *Shisō no kagaku* group by writing of "the silent peasant" (*mono iwanu nōmin*) and claiming somberly that the majority of farm folk not only didn't like writing groups but didn't particularly like expressing themselves in words at all—at least not to outsiders. These people of few words would presumably have possessed the *true* authentic voices, if there had been any way to elicit them. The movement as it was, Ōmura pointed out, was thus still elitist, despite its populist pretensions.[25] The writing circle, centered on an elite intellectual and her or his followers, had somehow to be broken to make the authentic voice audible.

Mizoue Yasuko's *Nihon no teihen* (At Japan's Base, 1959) offered one means to move a step away from the voluntary writing circle. Mizoue traveled the country giving home economics lectures, took the addresses of all who attended and sent them handwritten postcards, asking them to write down anything they wanted from their everyday lives and send it back to her. Exploiting the generally felt sense of obligation to respond to personal mail as a means to make a passive audience of farm women into active writers, Mizoue was able to fill a volume with the authentic—albeit epistolary—voices of her correspondents. The success of *Nihon no teihen* inspired a boom in writing about people at "the base" of Japanese society, indirectly raising the nettlesome issue of commodification again.[26]

I encountered one further type of effort within this genre of writing without writers while I was interviewing people in the mountains of Kiso. An informant had a mimeograph (*gariban-zuri*) from the 1960s of what was labeled a "relay diary" (*riree nikki*). A woman from each household in the *buraku* had written an entry, then passed the sheaf of paper on to a

---

[24] Kubota Masafumi, "'Seikatsu zakki' ni yosete," in *Asu ni ikiru: Shinshū no seikatsu zakki* (Shinano mainichi shinbunsha, 1970), p. 292.

[25] Amano Masako, *"Seikatsusha" to wa dare ka: jiritsuteki shiminzō no keifu* (Chūkō shinsho, 1996), p. 111.

[26] Amano, pp. 109-113.

neighbor. The process was initiated by a local home extension officer (*seikatsu kaizen fukyūin*)—an intellectual in a role like Tsurumi Kazuko's, but sent by the Ministry of Agriculture. When the "diary" had gone around every household, this person presumably brought the gathered pages to her office and made copies of them for everyone. Like Mizoue's postcards, this method used social obligation to elicit writing, overcoming the problem of depending only on people with the initiative to join a writing circle. Here, however, the instigator drew upon the social pressures of the existing community, in the manner of the neighborhood *kairanban*, thus initiating a process of narration that was both more group-oriented and more invasive—a kind of mutual interpellation.

The most successful form of daily-life writing from the 1970's to the present age of the blog was the one most suited to the individuated mass consumer society Japan had become: the self-history, or *jibunshi*. In his examination of the genre, Gerald Figal emphasizes the importance of manuals that provide a boilerplate for amateur autobiographers. A basic formula for the life of a hypothetical *seikatsusha* based on the idea of an archetypal ordinary Japanese life seems to have enabled this homogenization, and with it commodification, not of the product as literature, but of the whole process of producing the text. A mass-cultural rather than a popular-cultural form, *jibunshi* repudiated the group consciousness-raising of the *seikatsu tsuzurikata* tradition at the same time that it moved away from ethnovocalism's ideal of spontaneous expression. The paint-by-numbers approach removed the need for a facilitating intellectual and made it easier for all writers to fit themselves within the narration of national experience.

Yet my only intimate encounter with a text of this genre suggests to me that there are greater complexities here than just the workings of the mass market and the desires of many retired people to write something and claim a place for themselves in history. When I started the oral history project that led me subsequently to the relay diarists of Kiso, my first informant was an 80-year old woman named Chizuyo, living in retirement in the care of her son and his wife in Chiba. After I had interviewed her twice, her daughter-in-law asked me, would I like a copy of "granny's book" (*baachan no hon*)? It turned out that my interviewee was already the "author" of a full account of her life—one very much like the one she was then in the process of relating to me and my cassette tape recorder. It bore the rather fanciful title *Dance of Dreams* (*Yume no mai*). Later, reading Figal's article on *jibunshi*, I could see in *Dance of Dreams* what may well have been the traces of the boilerplate history that he describes. Chizuyo was a highly literate person (a published poet, in fact), and I could readily imagine her sitting down with a "how to *jibunshi*" guide and following its outline to pen her own autobiography (or indeed writing one without such aid). On closer examination, however, this *jibunshi* turned out not in fact to have been written by Chizuyo—at least Chizuyo was not the first person to apply pen to *genkō yōshi* in its crafting. The preface, written by Chizuyo's daughter-in-law and signed collectively by Chizuyo's children, thanks a local schoolteacher in Chiba for listening to Chizuyo and writing a draft of the autobiography. The children themselves then went over this draft and made a large number of corrections and amendments. The Chiba schoolteacher had not used a tape recorder to record Chizuyo speaking, but her children's editing, the preface openly acknowledges, was anyway not to correct inaccuracies in his record of Chizuyo but inaccuracies in (or embellishments of) her story by Chizuyo herself. Despite these many hands in its production, the narrative in the resulting text is seamless and in the first person. *Dance of Dreams* was printed privately by the family and given to friends, not sold. Certainly what it contains are the events of

her life, probably largely as she had told them to the Chiba schoolteacher. Why should they call it anything other than "*baachan no hon*"? But I would not be allowed by my academic audience to turn to this book for psychological insight into *baachan* as author. In this sense, this *jibunshi* is the antithesis of what an I-novel purports to be: it narrates a self, but that self is a messy pastiche, cobbled together by several parties using textual formulas, mediated utterances, editings and emendations; not a solitary, confessional self.

Ethnographism

If cowherd's calls and humming can be contemplated as *bungaku*, then there is little reason to limit the extended conception of literature to include only those ethnographic records that in some degree imitate the form of the novel. Why not also consider other forms of textual notation of lived experience?

Before concluding, I want to briefly present a second genre of texts for this purpose that is similarly ethnographic in character. In contrast, however, to the *seikatsu tsuzurikata* genre, which reifies the voice, this genre rejects the voice almost entirely. It thus adopts more of the position of the natural sciences, and certain text producers within the genre have self-consciously compared their work to archeology, entomology, or natural history generally. In its nineteenth-century incarnation, this mode of investigation and writing commonly came under the name *fūzokugaku* or *fūzokushi* (with the character *shi* meaning "chronicling" rather than "history"), and the name persists as a general classification.[27] The texts I am thinking of are compendia rather than sustained narratives, works that seek to notate and translate into print visual and kinetic events. Inasmuch as the events being observed are human, these works are a kind of ethnography, but since unlike most ethnography the texts tend to emphasize graphics—and indeed the graphic component is more developed than the conceptualization of *ethnos*—I'd like to call the genre "ethnographism."

The twentieth-century classic of ethnographism is the collection of writing and drawings published in 1930 as *Kōgengaku moderunorojio*. This volume's title page identifies Kon Wajirō, a professor of architecture at Waseda, and Yoshida Kenkichi, a theater set designer, as co-authors/editors (*hencho*). *Kōgengaku*, a neologism of Kon's devising that has since entered journalistic if not colloquial Japanese, refers to the study of modernity. Kon coined the term as a counterpart to *kōkogaku*, or archeology (*moderunorojio* was Kon's Esperanto translation for *kōgengaku*, which may therefore reasonably be rendered in English as "Modernology."). The volume *Kōgengaku moderunorojio* and a sequel that appeared the following year consisted of sketches, diagrams, statistics and analyses based on precise and often minute empirical surveys of hair and dress, patterns of pedestrian movement and assembly, and numerous other aspects of public behavior, including glances and whispers. Most were enumerated and labeled with the time and location at which the behaviors were observed.

---

[27] On *fūzokugaku* in the nineteenth century, see Suzanne O'Brien, "Custom-izing Everyday Life in Meiji Japan," PhD dissertation, Columbia University, 2003.

A number of scholars have written about Kon as ethnographer and thinker, including, in English, Miriam Silverberg and H.D. Harootunian.[28] It is common to discuss the texts of Modernology as if they were the work of a solitary author, setting aside the role of Yoshida Kenkichi along with over a dozen others whose names appear as survey collaborators. In addition, few analyses in either English or Japanese focus on what surely made the books appeal to a wide reading public: their graphic exuberance and inventiveness.[29] Although studies of Modernology as an expression of Kon's thought have important things to say about this unusual intellectual and his social milieu, they thereby miss two key features of the Modernology texts.

To address the simpler point first: since the surveys required the simultaneous observing and recording work of multiple participants, if we take this step of the process seriously, *Kōgengaku moderunorojio* is not only a multi-authored text but a diffusely authored one. Some chapters are credited to authors other than Kon and Yoshida. In most, one of the two main author-editor's names appears at the head, but the commentary often refers to third parties responsible for the actual labor, and even the devising, of the survey being discussed. In addition to the overall directorial work of Kon and Yoshida, a certain amount of personnel management was probably also handled by editors from the monthly journal Women's Review, which provided reporters to participate in the survey and published survey results before they were collected in the two anthologies.

As Harootunian has observed, Kon pursued a reflexive approach based on observation from within everyday life as it unfolded rather than standing back to offer analysis from a position of "hermeneutic privilege."[30] This provides one explanation for the second distinctive feature of *Kōgengaku moderunorojio* and its sequel: their unusual use of drawings. The two volumes were not so much texts with illustrations as illustrations with text, pages of notation representing experience-rendered-into-graphemes with the thought-rendered-into-words of Kon and Yoshida appended afterward to gloss the images. These graphic notations emerged, as much as possible (that is, this was the ideal toward which their team strove), in bricolage fashion. Real-time encounters with the raw sensory information of everyday life revealed patterns, and the surveyor then found graphic expression for them. Each type of survey therefore yielded new techniques of notation. The project was an experiment in the relationship between lived experience and the movement of the writing implement on paper—the recording of experience not mulled, stewed, or reflected upon, but noted on a particular Saturday afternoon at 3:25 p.m. on a particular stretch of the Ginza, in pursuit of an immediacy that defied the processes of intellection as traditionally understood. Kon and Yoshida were not trying by this method to suppress or deny the mediation of authors and editors between everyday life and print; instead, they were trying to make authorial mediation more dynamic and spontaneous, privileging the

---

[28] Miriam Silverberg, " Constructing the Japanese Ethnography of Modernity, *Journal of Asian Studies* 51: 1 (1992), 30-54; H.D. Harootunian, *Overcome by Modernity: History, Culture, and Community in Interwar Japan* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), pp. 178-201.

[29] The salient exception of which I am aware is Satō Kenji's discussion in *Fūkei no seisan, fūkei no kaihō media no arukeorojii* (Kōdansha, 1994), pp. 104-119. My own reading is influenced by Satō's treatment of the issue of notational methods in *kōgengaku*.

[30] Harootunian, *Overcome by Modernity*, pp. 184-5.

accidents of everyday life wherever possible over the author's analytic consciousness, yet still wholly retaining the presence of authors and editors, sometimes as simple recording machines, sometimes as playful and ironic artists and writers. The resulting books defied literary, artistic and ethnographic boundaries.

Despite the prodigious quantities of social data and the eclectic manner in which Modernology texts presented it, nowhere in the pages of these volumes does one encounter a speaking subject. Kon and Yoshida avoided the core methods of fieldwork with human subjects: the questionnaire and the interview. Architecture historian Fujimori Terunobu, who considers himself an heir of Kon's, has suggested that this is partly explained by Kon's Tōhoku roots. As an immigrant, Fujimori proposes, Kon was self-conscious, never completely at home communicating in the national language spoken in Tokyo.[31] This reading situates Kon somewhere between the facilitating intellectual and the peasant *seikatsusha*: had his migration been in the other direction, he might have been a Tsurumi Shunsuke or Kazuko, but transplanted from the provinces to the capital, he was a *mono iwanu nōmin*. Although this personality-based explanation has merit, Kon (and Yoshida)'s choice of silence can also be read within the strategies of their ethnographic enterprise. Refusing to ask questions of subjects appeared to solve a problem of mediation. One of the great dilemmas of modern anthropology has been how to devise models of how people behave rather than of how they talk about how they behave.[32] Kon, Yoshida and their collaborators used ethnographism to finesse this: their illustrations-with-text announced, in effect, "this is how we recorded certain behaviors or patterns we saw," rather than, "this is how people behave." Unquestionably, they were recording information from everyday life, not merely sketching for pleasure. Yet their emphasis on graphic technique drew attention back to moment in which the surveyor saw and recorded, a moment ideally conceived as prior to digestion and reconstitution in language.

Kōgengaku has inspired a number of followers since 1930, some less preoccupied with immediacy in the relationship between the ethnographist and the site of everyday life, but all sharing the desire to take a core sample or a data set raw from everyday life and make it visible, convey it intact; and all choosing the multi-authored graphic compendium as the way to achieve this in print.

One group that has sought the mantle of a new *kōgengaku* is the Street Observation Science Society (*Rojō kansatsu gakkai*), founded in 1986 by Fujimori Terunobu (cited above) and artist Akasegawa Genpei. The Street Observationists have tended to use cameras more than sketches and diagrams, and have turned their lenses toward inanimate features of the streetscape rather than human behavior. Like Kon and Yoshida, however, they use the graphic medium to bring to readers subtle empirical observations from the everyday environment that would otherwise escape conscious recognition. Spontaneity and collaborative production also figure centrally. The typical Street Observation text is a slide show in print form. The comments of several members of the group are printed *zadankai* style together with numbered photographs that members introduce in turn. In some cases, the text even records the speaker saying "next

---

[31] Fujimori Terunobu interview, October 22nd, 2000.

[32] See Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1977), particularly pp. 16-22.

slide" or an onomatopoeic rendition of the sound of a projector changing slides. The group is presented in the text brainstorming freely as members devise clever captions for the slides. Here the freshness is in the closeness of the text to the Observationists' moment of verbal improvisation rather than in the closeness of the improvised technique of notation to the life being recorded. Someone has recorded their conversation and printed it complete with laugh track alongside reproductions of the slides they were looking at. The Observationists' photographs freeze the object for later examination and manipulation, whereas the Modernologists' drawings sought to convey dynamic movement in the moment of recording. Both, however, sell a form of *nama-rashisa*.

Finally, I will just briefly mention two favorite examples that may be placed on the periphery of the ethnographist genre. The first is a work that also has elements of ethnovocalism and carries us back to the age of the facilitating intellectual and the silent peasant. This is a book published in 1989 by the left-wing agricultural research organization *Nōbunkyō* under the title *Shokoku doburoku hōten* (Treasury of Moonshine from Many Lands) with the sublime and virtually untranslatable supertitle (text, that is, preceding the title on the title page) *Tsukuru, nomu, mawaru*.[33] It teaches readers how to make *sake* according to the methods of twenty five farmer informants in different regions of Japan and one in Peru. Each page introduces a site and informant, diagrams the process of manufacture and quotes the informant in an approximate transcription of dialect. The entire printed text is handwritten. Humorous caricatures, numbered diagrams, blocks of text in large, ungainly characters, and scattered tiny jottings blend promiscuously on the page to convey not only the actual methods but as much as possible of the atmospheric gestalt of moonshine making and drinking.

The second, titled (in *katakana*) 2002 *Seoul Style*, is the print and internet publication accompanying an exhibit at the National Museum of Ethnology in Osaka.[34] If "Treasury of Moonshine" gestures back toward the locally-defined world of *seikatsu tsuzurikata*, *Seoul Style* brings us forward into the borderless era of the blog, in which everyone and no one is a facilitating intellectual. Given the task to design an exhibit on contemporary Korea, museum curator Satō Kōji chose to thwart the expectations of typicality by building the entire exhibit around the single urban household of a bureaucrat in the Korean government's cultural affairs office, someone occupying a position similar to Satō's own. He photographed and documented every item in the family's two-bedroom apartment, down to the last pencil stub and pair of underwear. Eventually, the family agreed to donate all of their possessions to the museum's permanent collection and the museum, in exchange, financed their purchase of new ones. The exhibit website contained a photographic database of all 7000+ objects as well as a log of emails

---

[33] Kaibara Hiroshi, Atarashiya Rakusan, Sasano Kōtarō, *Tsukuru, nomu, mawaru: Shokoku doburoku hōten* (Nōbunkyō, 1989). The sublime untranslatability of "tsukuru, nomu, mawaru," lies in the intransitive verb "mawaru," to go around (as the *sake* goes around among friends and the alcohol goes around in the head, but perhaps also as the head itself goes around afterward), following the transitive verbs "make" and "drink" in a false parallelism that shifts the grammatical subject unannounced from the maker of moonshine to the moonshine itself.

[34] Asakura Toshio and Satō Kōji, *hencho*, *2002 nen Sōru sutairu: Ri-san ikka no sugao no kurashi* (Zaidan hōjin Senri bunka zaidan, 2002); http://www.minpaku.ac.jp/seoul_seikatsu/. For a discussion by the curator of the exhibit's intent, see Satō Kōji, "Ie no naka no mono kara miete kuru mono: '2002 nen Sōru sutairu' ten kara," in Nojima Hisao and Harada Etsuko eds., *'Ie no naka' o ninshiku kagaku suru: kawaru kazoku, mono, manabi, gijutsu* (Shin'yōsha, 2004), pp. 81-120.

exchanged between the curator and the family (through a Japanese-Korean translation program) about the nature and function of individual objects. Here we seem to approach the outer limit of the search for a literature that speaks from the lifeworld: an attempt to make material objects themselves speak across cultural boundaries with minimal intervention of analytic language. *Seoul Style*'s utopian faith in articulate objects recalls the story of the wise men of Lagado in Gulliver's Travels, who decided to eliminate words altogether by carrying with them bundles of things to show one another and thereby express their meanings directly, "since Words are only Names for *Things…*"[35]

Conclusion

Whether or not they belong within the category *bungaku*, ethnovocalism and ethnographism represent two lineages of experimentation in relating text and everyday life. Both tried to create and publish something that would not be slotted in the existing categories of literature and art. One driving force behind this was a desire to rethink the commodification of the text under capitalism. It is no coincidence that the anxiously anti-fictional *seikatsu tsuzurikata* emerged in the first generation of the celebrity mass-market author and the *enpon*, and Modernology in the mass society of the 1920s. Exponents of *seikatsu tsuzurikata* considered the *shōsetsu* an inferior relative of a more genuine literature created outside the market. The Modernologists had close ties to Dada and other avant-garde movements concerned with critiquing mass society from a position within it. In their different ways, both movements grappled with the dilemma that in capitalist society publication means commodification.

As efforts to translate the chaos of life to the printed page, both set themselves an impossible task: to remove the mediation of the *genkō yōshi*, the private space of the study, and, in some degree, of the intellect itself, in order to convey life directly to print. Viewing them positively, it seems to me that the very impossibility of what they were trying to do was the source of their inventiveness. It was precisely out of the encounter between the idealism of this initial impulse and the intractable paradoxes of the way life is experienced and translated by the senses and the mind that the restless creativity of these genres emerged.

---

[35] Jonathan Swift, *Gulliver's Travels*, excerpted in *Making Things Public: Atmospheres of Democracy*, edited by Bruno Latour and Peter Weibel (Cambridge, MA and London: MIT Press and ZKM, 2005), p. 44.