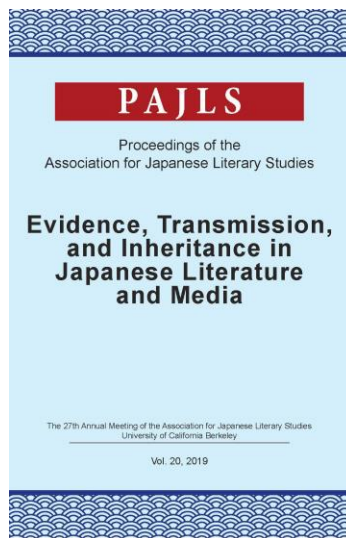


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THE INTERSECTION OF ADVERTISING, POETRY, AND MEDIA: AMANO YŪKICHI'S CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF JAPAN'S 1980S

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The economic euphoria during Japan's 1980s underlined the development of advertising, the tropes and modes of which brought a breath of fresh air to the use of ordinary language in a different manner from that of the mainstream of modern Japanese poetry. As such, Japan's new lines of advertising first gained attention from outside of academic circles, most notably by the publication of the journal *Ad Criticism* 広告批評 (1979–2009) with Amano Yūkichi 天野祐吉 (1933–2013) as the editor-in-chief from 1979 to 1988. The television as a cultural force in Japan's 1980s was a central idea in Amano's critical analysis of advertising. Amano's analysis revealed the intersections of print media and empowered TV media while also showing his rethinking of Marshall McLuhan's (1911–1980) reflection of advertising and media. Resonating with Amano's analysis of advertising, influential taglines such as “tasty life” (おいしい生活)—which was created by a leading copywriter Itoi Shigesato 糸井重里 (1948–) in 1982—captured Japan's sociocultural context in the decade of both print and TV ads. Such taglines thereby appealed to the common people who departed from the ethos of postwar Japan that centered around the notion of affluent life as the driving force of Japan's manufacturing and mass consumerism.

This essay examines how Amano's critical analysis of advertising calls attention to its intersection not just with media but also with poetry in the 1980s. Poet and translator Tanikawa Shuntarō 谷川俊太郎 (1931–) was in dialogue with Amano and absorbed many of his ideas into his poetry. By concentrating on the intersection between advertising and poetry this essay offers an approach to understanding Tanikawa's innovative use of the Japanese language during the 1980s, the pinnacle of Japan's industrial era and the eve of its postindustrial era that began in the early 1990s as well.

THE ELUSIVE SOCIOCULTURAL CONTEXT OF JAPAN'S 1980S

*The 1980s*² is the first anthology to attempt to grasp Japan's 1980s in its totality. It comprises twenty-two essays that focus on various cultural

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² Saitō Minako and Narita Ryūichi, eds., *1980 nendai* (Tokyo: Kawade shobō

phenomena during the decade and four tripartite talks that dissect its multivalent nature. In one talk, titled “Catalogue, The Left, and Vanity Lecture (カタログ, サヨク, 見栄講座),” by Narita Ryūichi, Saitō Minako, and Ōsawa Masachi, Ōsawa divides postwar Japan into three periods, namely “the idealistic period” (理想の時代, from 1945 to the first half of the 1970s), “the unreal period” (虚構の時代, from the second half of the 1970s to 1995),³ and “the period of impossibility” (不可能性の時代, from 1995 onward).⁴ Regarding the first period, he writes that people almost unanimously followed certain ideals, such as the pursuit of an affluent life (豊かな生活) in a time when Japan’s thriving mass consumerism heavily depended on manufacturing.

Such an ideal resonates with some key notions that widely appealed to the common people in postwar Japan. Nakai Masakazu 中井正一 (1900–1952), for example, wrote: “It should not be forgotten that, in the nearly thirty-years-process of postwar Japanese history, ‘August 15th’ has been constantly called out to return to one question: what is democracy? People that were once obedient objects have gradually become responsible subjects that create their own history.”⁵ While calling postwar Japan a new age but at the same time vulnerable,⁶ Nakai further elaborates on the role of the responsible subject in the emergent culture in postwar Japan: “Popular culture cannot break with a kind of amateurism [as its remarkable characteristic]. Any fiction of popular culture must retain within itself ties to its nonfiction, as works in popular culture reflect various aspects of the time.”⁷ Nakai’s notion of a bottom-up wish for a democratic society to produce responsible subjects and to embrace a kind of amateurism played a vital role in popular culture in postwar Japan, particularly in the 1960s to the 1980s.

Ōsawa, on the other hand, points to the deceptively convoluted relationship between the second and third periods in that the former feels as if it were real only when seen from the latter that has been generally called the “lost decade.” Hence, he says: “the existence of the 1990s would

shinsha, 2016).

³ According to Ōsawa, 1983 is the culmination of the 1980s; Tokyo Disneyland opened in 1983 and is an epitome of “the unreal period.” All translations are mine unless otherwise indicated.

⁴ Saitō and Narita, 31.

⁵ All of Nakai’s remarks quoted here are quoted in Etō Fumio, “Taishū no jidai, taishū no bunka: sengo o kangaeru,” *Taishū bunka no sōzō*, vol. 4 of *Kōza: Komyunikēshon*, ed. Etō Fumio, Tsurumi Shunsuke, and Yamamoto Akira (Tokyo: Kenkyūsha, 1973), 17.

⁶ Etō, 16.

⁷ Etō, 19.

amount to the nonexistence of the 1980s. Such an inversion seems to work for me in order to understand the nature of the 1980s” (九〇年代が存在したならば、八〇年代はなかったということですよ。私はこの図と地を反転させた逆の見方の方が正しいような気がします)。⁸ Seen from today’s perspective, the extended lost decades should be real to the vast majority of Japanese people because of the economic impact on everyday life in the post-bubble era, leading them to feel as if the second period did not exist. Further, the “lost decades” in the period of impossibility obviously does not just indicate Japan’s economic slump, but also the changing sociocultural context inflicted by the slump. In this regard, it should be noted that Ōsawa points out that Japanese people today tend to feel nostalgia for Showa 30s (1955–1964) during “the idealistic period,” and not for “the unreal period.”⁹ This view paints the latter decade so elusively that it defies any single attempt at definition and calls for the multiple approaches as implemented in *The 1980s*.

Despite its fundamentally elusive nature, however, Japan’s 1980s is still a transition from the first to the third period in terms of economic history: “In the 1980s, most Japanese economists were under the illusion that the American economy would continue to decline and that Japan would surpass America as the world’s largest economy. In fact, the Japanese economy was reaching the apex of its prosperity while the U.S. economy, with its different systems and customs, was languishing.”¹⁰ But now we all know how this rosy prediction ended, as concluded in the same article: “In the 1990s, Japan has been marking time, so to speak, on a platform leading to the postindustrial society, as America was in the 1980s. That is why the Japanese economy stagnated throughout the 1990s. At the beginning of the 21st century, it is still marking time.” Here the 1980s comes to the fore as the decade when the end of Japan’s industrial era looms in the midst of its prosperity toward the economic bubble. And the decade failed to find a smooth transition to a postindustrial era, the period that Ōsawa would call “the period of impossibility” from 1995 onward.

In this historically transitional period, some key concepts, such as bottom-up democracy and amateurism, developed into the sociocultural context exemplified by the creative community in the 1980s. The next section examines the role of Amano in the community to show a transition from the idealistic to the unreal period in Ōsawa’s words.

⁸ Saitō and Narita, 23.

⁹ Saitō and Narita, 42.

¹⁰ Sawa Takamitsu, “Postindustrial Economy Calls,” *The Japan Times* 13 Mar. 1997. <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/opinion/2001/03/13/commentary/postindustrial-economy-calls/>

AMANO YŪKICHI'S *AD CRITICISM* AS LIFE CRITICISM

Kashima Takashi claims that Japan's 1980s was the age of advertising: "Of course, advertising existed before 1980. But it was in the 1980s that advertising became closely connected with the everyday life of the populace, leading us to understand the social and cultural landscape of the time."¹¹ In this view, Kashima regards Amano Yūkichi, who started the journal *Ad Criticism* 広告批評 in 1979, as the central figure in leading the creative advertising community to materialize in the early 1980s, calling attention to Amano's words: "There had been no criticism of advertising before we started the journal." But Amano's role as the editor-in-chief of the journal developed from his experience of editing a trade magazine *Advertising* 広告 for Hakuhōdō, a major advertising and public relations company ranked with Dentsū, in the 1960s. In the magazine, Amano's early reflection on advertising can be found: "Advertising, by nature, anticipates people's desire for affluence. Constant updates of the standard for affluence, in turn, cultivate people's desire. That's what advertising is all about." It should be noted that Amano further elaborates the relationship of desire and everyday life: "Unless seen in the eyes of 'life criticism' 生活批評, the eyes of ordinary people that watch products closely in order to build up their better life, the 'fulfillment of desire' is in vain, with the result that no product is able to strike a chord with people despite catching their eyes."¹²

Amano's early reflection on advertising clearly resonates with the aforementioned notion of Nakai Masakazu: a bottom-up wish for a democratic society with a responsible subject and a layman's point of view. A further development of the notion is exemplified by ads in the late 1950s to the early 1960s, notably for Torys whisky, with the popular lines:

「人間」らしくやりたいナ / トリスを飲んで「人間」らしくやり
たいナ / 「人間」なんだからナ

I hope to feel any 'humanity' / I want Torys to feel that way / cuz
I am a human.¹³

Created in 1958 by the novelist Kaikō Takeshi 開高健 (1930–1989) when he was still employed by Kotobukiya (now Suntory), the tag line, along

¹¹ Saitō and Narita, 291.

¹² Saitō and Narita, 292. Quoted in Kashima's article. It is originally in Amano Yūkichi, *Kiita kōkoku* (Tokyo: Akita shoten, 1970), 207.

¹³ <https://gensun.org/?img=i%2Epinimg%2Ecom%2Eoriginals%2F6c%2F88%2F86%2F6c8886779e002c0e7bc4bc398063dfef%2Ejpg>

with Yanagihara Ryōhei's 柳原良平 (1931–2015) iconic illustration, gained attention from a wide range of people, particularly white collar “salarymen” who played a vital role in Japan’s high economic growth during the 1950s to 1960s. Along with “Uncle Torgy,” a main character in Yanagihara’s illustration, the tag line promoted middle-class values to ordinary people in pursuit of an affluent life.

The development of Amano’s reflection on advertising in the early 1980s underlined Japanese society’s gradual shift from the ethos of postwar Japan that centered around the notion of affluent life as the driving force of Japan’s mass consumerism to that of the 1980s. Such a shift is illustrated by the influential tag line “tasty life” (おいしい生活),¹⁴ which was created by Itoi Shigesato in 1982. In his talk with the novelist and poet Tsujii Takashi 辻井喬 (1927–2013),¹⁵ Amano states:

Why can’t we leave the conventional value standard based on good or bad for the one based on likes and dislikes from a personal viewpoint? ‘Tasty Life’ proposed this question. I think it was the time to give vent to our own sensibilities. [...] In doing so, the tag line highlights a demand among ordinary people to modify the American-style of affluent life.¹⁶

Japan’s postwar ethos was not only dominated by the American-style of affluent life, but retained even the wartime system. Noguchi Yukio would call the “1940 system” that continued to inform Japanese-style management, a system that, according to Yamazaki Masaki,¹⁷ continued to work until the end of Japan’s economic bubble in the early 1990s. In this light, despite pointing to postwar Japan’s significant progress toward affluence, ads like the one for Torgy whisky are indicative of the limit of the package that did not necessarily include a wide range of people that “Tasty Life” embraced. Conversely, the creative advertising community led by Amano and a new generation of copywriters in the early 1980s

¹⁴ <http://www.nicovideo.jp/watch/sm24985037>

¹⁵ Tsujii is also known as Tsutsumi Seiji 堤清二, Head of the Saison Group (1964–1991) that galvanized the Seibu department stores and other stores in urban spaces such as Shibuya into the hub for youth culture and sophisticated taste for a mass consumerism during the decade.

¹⁶ Amano Yūkichi, “Tsujii Takashi: Māketingu byō ni mushibamareta sokoku,” *Sayonara kōkoku, sayonara Nippon: Amano Yūkichi taiwashū* (Tokyo: Geijutsu shinbunsha, 2014), 121.

¹⁷ Yamazaki Masaki, “Sengo Nihon ni okeru keizai katsuryoku no gensen: Nihongata keiei shisutemu ni okeru kojū no katsuryoku no shiten kara,” *Nagano daigaku kiyō* 23:2 (2001): 95–107.

appealed to the sensibilities of a wider range of people in the last decade of Japan's industrial era based on manufacturing and the pursuit of affluence.

**ADVERTISING AS ART: AMANO'S RETHINKING OF MARSHALL
MCLUHAN'S REFLECTION ON MEDIA**

As Amano points out in his essay "The Age of Television" (テレビの時代, 1987), Japan's television broadcasting began in 1953: "Since then, the world constructed by print culture has started to be out of touch with the changing reality. This shift was never more evident than in the 1980s."¹⁸ In this context, Amano refers to some key ideas from Marshall McLuhan's study of TV media vis-à-vis his reflection on advertising. Among them, Amano particularly points to the "TV mosaic," an idea that McLuhan describes in his *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (1964): "the TV image itself is a flat two-dimensional mosaic. Most of the three-dimensional illusion is a carry-over of habitual viewing of film and photo. For the TV camera does not have a built-in angle of vision like the movie camera."¹⁹ This lack of a built-in angle of the "cool TV medium promotes depth structures in art and entertainment alike, and creates audience involvement in depth as well,"²⁰ in contrast with film and photo that are categorized as the "hot" media with print culture.

Such a feature of TV is further related by McLuhan to people's everyday life: "since [TV] has affected the totality of our lives, personal and social and political, it would be quite unrealistic to attempt a 'systematic' or visual presentation of such influence. Instead, it is more feasible to 'present' TV as a complex *gestalt* of data gathered almost at random."²¹ And in conclusion he states that "[TV] is not so much a visual as a tactual-auditory medium that involves all of our senses in depth interplay. For people long accustomed to the merely visual experience of the typographic and photographic varieties, that dislocates them from their usual attitudes of passivity and detachment."²²

Here the notion of advertising as art comes to the fore, the origin of which harks back to McLuhan's 1952 article "Advertising as a Magical

¹⁸ Amano Yūkichi, *Kōkoku mitai na hanashi* (Tokyo: Shinchōsha, 1990; originally published in 1987), 164.

¹⁹ Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1964), 313.

²⁰ McLuhan (1964), 312.

²¹ McLuhan (1964), 317.

²² McLuhan (1964), 336.

Institution” (1952):²³ “Ads in fact may be regarded as a major aspect of the art and ritual of industrial society. It is not without its ludicrous aspects that art should find its patrons and promoters precisely among the ‘vulgar’ and ‘blatant’ hucksters,”²⁴ a notion that, according to Richard Cavell, “inaugurates the momentous change of focus in McLuhan’s study of media from mechanical to electronic culture.”²⁵

“TV” as a complex *gestalt*,” along with the “TV mosaic,” may well lead Amano to formulate his approach to the perception of Japan’s 1980s, the decade in the twilight of the industrial era and on the eve of the postindustrial era that follows the end of Japan’s economic bubble, in his attempt to capture what is real through multiple perspectives of TV, or an “anarchic perspective” (アナキーな視点) in his word, on advertising. Here lies his ad criticism as social and life criticism.

THE REVITALIZATION OF ORDINARY JAPANESE LANGUAGE: THE INTERSECTION OF ADVERTISING AND POETRY

In his career as a poet that began in 1950, Tanikawa Shuntarō implemented some poetic experiments in the 1980s. This was partially his attempt to reinvigorate the Japanese language in poetry in a different manner from that of the mainstream of modern Japanese poetry, which had significantly lost readership because poems had become out of touch with the everyday lives of ordinary people.²⁶ This observation led him to bring back what McLuhan would call the “tactual-auditory” quality of Japanese by using hiragana characters extensively in his poems. The first attempt in this vein can be found in his 1973 book of poems *ことばあそびうた* (Poems of words at play) and it is followed by *にほんご* (Japanese, 1979), a collaborative effort to create a “Japanese textbook” for children with Ōoka Makoto, Anno Mitsumasa, and Matsui Tadashi. The latter with Tanikawa as the principal author does not follow the governmental curriculum guideline on purpose, suggesting an alternative to standard Japanese education. Yamada Kaoru, in his talk with Tanikawa, takes the

²³ Marshall McLuhan, “Advertising as a Magical Institution,” *On the Nature of Media*, ed. Richard Cavell (Berkeley, CA: Gingko P, 2016), 14–24.

²⁴ McLuhan, “Advertising,” 22

²⁵ See Richard Cavell’s comments in McLuhan, “Advertising,” 14.

²⁶ Ōoka Makoto and Tanikawa Shuntarō, *Taidan: Gendaishi nyūmon* (Tokyo: Chūkō bunko, 1989; Originally, Chūōkōron, 1985), 71; Tanikawa Shuntarō and Yamada Kaoru, *Boku wa kō yatte shi o kaitekita: Tanikawa Shuntarō shi to jinsei o kataru* [Hereafter, BSKS] (Tokyo: Nanaroku sha, 2010), 325; see Amano Yūichi, *Kōkoku no hon* (Tokyo: Chikuma, 1986) for a talk with Tanikawa (60–79) and a talk with Itoi (182–207).

effort to be Tanikawa's "literary work" written by hiragana only, if not poetry.²⁷

A series of Tanikawa's poetry in hiragana aims to regain a "sensual quality" (肉感性)²⁸ of poetry, not just to use words as a vehicle for a message:

Poetry is not for transmitting messages, but for putting fine words in Japanese to reify things themselves.

詩ってというのはメッセージを伝えるものではなくて、日本語の美しい言葉を、そこにとにかく置く、それから存在そのものをそこに置く²⁹

This approach to poetry enables Tanikawa to cover almost any aspect of everyday life from a child's perspective, which Tanikawa elaborates:

In Japanese poetry there is a major genre with children as the main subject, which, in my view, is underlined by an adult's viewpoint that is somewhat didactic to children. [...] Since a certain point of my life, I have been fairly aware that I want to write poems from children's perspectives, not to preach to them, but to make them see something [unknown or unfathomable] in life.

いわゆる児童詩と言われるものが、結構日本の詩の世界にはジャンルとして大きいんですけど、読んでみるとやっぱりなんか大人の視線で、下に子供を見てる。[...]子どもと同じ目線で書きたいし、こっちが教え諭すんじゃなくて、何かを気づかせるっていうのかな、あるものを提示するみたいな書き方をしたいってことは、あるときからわりと意識していました³⁰

Here it should be noted that children's perspective is posited as an alternative to adults' perspective, which is reminiscent of McLuhan's view: the "built-in angle" of the "hot media" including print culture. In this context, what Tanikawa calls a "sensual quality" of poetry is reified in

²⁷ *BKSK*, 326.

²⁸ *BKSK*, 347.

²⁹ *BKSK*. My translation of 存在そのもの as "things themselves" is based on Yamada's indication of the affinity with Maurice Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology in Tanikawa's poetry. See *BKSK*, 248.

³⁰ *BKSK*, 351.

various styles—from lyrical to nonsensical—and contents—from social to scatological. Yamada says this often evokes “a reverberation of unclassifiable voices and tones” (分類不能な多様な声と音の響き)³¹ for readers, echoing with a “complex *gestalt* of data gathered almost at random” in McLuhan’s reflection on TV.

In the next round of books of poems starting with his 1981 book of poems *わらべうた* (Children’s Songs), Tanikawa not only continues to explore the tactual-auditory quality of hiragana, he also adds a critical tone to children’s perspective on people’s everyday life. This new trend in Tanikawa’s poetry is exemplified by a poem titled “Slow Yuki-chan” (ゆっくりゆきちゃん) from his 1982 book of poems *わらべうた続* (Children’s Songs 2):

ゆっくりゆきちゃん ゆっくりおきて/ゆっくりがおを ゆっくり
 りあらい/ゆっくりパンを ゆっくりたべて/ゆっくりぐつを
 ゆっくりはいた/ゆっくりみちを ゆっくりあるき/ゆっくりけ
 しきを ゆっくりながめ/ゆっくりがっこうの もんまできたら
 /もうがっこうは おわってた/ゆっくりゆうやけ ゆっくりく
 れる/ゆっくりゆきちゃん ゆっくりあわて/ゆっくりうちへ
 かえってみたら/むすめがさんにん うまれてた

Yukkuri [Slow] Yuki-chan woke up slowly / washed her *yukkuri* face slowly / ate the *yukkuri* bread slowly / put on the *yukkuri* shoes slowly // walked down the *yukkuri* road slowly / looked at the *yukkuri* scenery slowly / arrived at the *yukkuri* school slowly / only to know the school was over / It got dark slowly after the *yukkuri* sunset / *Yukkuri* Yuki-chan rushed home slowly / to find three girls born³²

According to Tanikawa, the social criticism of modern Japan is implied by the title itself, which reveals the harsh reality surrounding children of Japan today.³³ Also, the poem shows the repetitive use of *yukkuri* (ゆっくり [slow]), a trope that creates incongruity between sense and nonsense in each line and evokes the “complex *gestalt*” of a child’s world, where time passes slowly, in a “tactual-auditory” manner. In this light, the last two lines contrast with the other lines, highlighting Yuki-chan’s isolation.

³¹ *BKSK*, 337.

³² *BKSK*, 329–330.

³³ *BKSK*, 331.

Tanikawa's poetic experiment by focusing on the use of hiragana in the 1980s, together with his other modes of expression including aphoristic poems and prose poems that use all components of the Japanese writing systems, namely hiragana, katakana, and kanji (Chinese characters), is conducive to understanding the notion of the totality of Japanese (日本語の総体) that is found in Kitagawa Tōru's 北川透 (1935-) essay on Tanikawa. According to Kitagawa, behind this notion lies the "collective unconscious of those whose native tongue is Japanese" (日本語を母語とする人たちの集合的な無意識). Kurihara Atsushi further relates the notion to Tanikawa's words from his 1985 collection of essays *Focus on Words* (言葉を中心に):

It is almost impossible to restore an all-embracing vision in modern human society on earth where complicated information, crises, and all sorts of egoism are intertwined. [...] Such vision may be approached only through a compilation of various kinds of poems as if they were a patchwork or montage of fragments.

これだけ情報があふれ、危機にみち、人間のエゴイズムが複雑にからみあった現代の地球上の人間社会に、一つの全体的なヴィジョンを回復するなんてことは至難のわざだ [...] たとえてみればパッチワークのようにとりとめなく断片をモンタージュして、つまりさまざまな詩を集めたその集合としてしか、全体に迫ることができないのだ³⁴

CONCLUSION

In his essay "60 years of TV Commercials" (テレビ CM 60年, 2013),³⁵ Amano claims that Japan's mid-1990s witnessed the impasse of TV commercials following the end of Japan's economic bubble. His claims point to the end of Japan's industrial era, which heavily depended on manufacturing in response to consumers' desire for commodities (モノ [*mono*]). They also point to the advent of the postindustrial era, which ushered in the age of information (コト [*koto*]). Regarding this, Amano states: "a new kind of dynamics of advertising is needed. How can advertising, which sedulously created images for Japan's postwar life, create images for a new kind of lifestyle in the age of post-growth (脱成長

³⁴ Kurihara Atsushi, "Kaisetsu," *Korega watashino yaasashisa desu: Tanikawa Shuntarō shishū* (Tokyo: Shūeisha, 1993), 237–238.

³⁵ Kawade shobō shinsha, *Amano Yūkichi: Keizai taikoku ni yaji o* (Tokyo: Kawade shobō shinsha, 2014).

時代).”³⁶ Together with influential tag lines by copywriters (e.g., Itoi Shigesato) in the 1980s, Amano Yūkichi’s reflection on advertising inevitably intersects with media and ordinary Japanese language and rethinks Marshall McLuhan’s media theory by sharing concerns about the potential of the Japanese language with poets like Tanikawa Shuntarō. The dynamics between advertising and media then are once again worth revisiting as a clue to creating images for a new kind of lifestyle in a post-growth era.

³⁶ Amano Yūkichi: *Keizai taikoku ni yaji o*, 183.