Introduction

In the following pages, I attempt to set forth what might be considered a divergent or dissenting approach to Japan studies, one primarily concerned with the question of method rather than the more traditional focus on objects. It must be immediately added, however, that there is nothing unique about either Japan or Japan studies that would prevent my remarks from conceivably being applied to other branches of area studies as well. The study of area is typically established on the basis of the unit of the individual nation-state—e.g., French studies, China studies, etc.—and this national unity is given substance by appeal to a unified people, culture, and language. This very division of knowledge, I contend, is intrinsically nationalistic. Regardless of whether the individual scholar comes to treat the problem of nationalism, his or her participation in the discourse of area studies already reinforces the overall sense of national oneness. In order to examine the root of this problem, attention must be directed to the general manner in which difference and identity are conceived and institutionally organized. With particular focus on the region of area studies known as "Japan," I aim to show that our thinking of such sites must be placed on a more rigorously critical footing.

How, then, might one contribute to the formation of a critical Japan studies? This is the question that motivates the writing of this book. As goes without saying, such a question did not arise out of thin air; on the contrary, it is ineluctably a response to the dynamics of the North American field of Japan studies that I have witnessed and participated in for nearly two decades now. Certainly there is much to commend about the current scholarship in this field, and there can be little doubt that the discipline as a whole has continued to evolve in such a way as to become more critically self-conscious and finely attuned to the politicality inherent in any project of knowledge. A glance at recent publications in the major subfields of

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modern literature and history, for example, reveals a powerful and ongoing scrutiny of the various instances of Japanese nationalism and imperialism. The critical impulse that shapes this work also informs the converse of such scholarship, in which various manifestations of *resistance* to nationalism and imperialism receive sustained attention as a way to better engage with issues of ethics and politics. Distinguishing itself from the work produced in the early decades of the Japan studies field following the end of World War II, contemporary scholarship continues to build on the theoretical insights that gradually began to appear in the 1980s. Such schools of thought as poststructuralism, Marxism, feminism, postcolonial studies, psychoanalysis, and queer studies now form an unmistakable presence in the diverse investigations into modern Japanese phenomena, functioning as valuable tools with which to understand Japan more globally and with greater conceptual sensitivity. This trend can be said to signal the establishment of a properly critical Japan studies.

At the same time, however, questions linger as to the nature of this theoretical-critical progress. It is to assess the state of these advancements that I examine the general problem of method. Method, from the Greek *hodos*, or "way," names the path upon which the subject of knowledge enters the domain of its objects. However, if we are to avoid the trap of a subjective formalism in which a set of theories already formulated in advance can simply be applied to any and all Japanese objects, then it must be admitted that this methodological path originates in the object itself. In the particular context of Japan studies, does this mean that the method most befitting the object is to be found in Japan? Such a position would appear to bring us close to the notion of "Asia as method" (*hōhō to shite no Ajia*) as introduced by the social critic and China scholar Takeuchi Yoshimi.[1] Yet it is clear that in these questions of knowledge one cannot suddenly leap to an empirical Japan as the real, extradiscursive site upon which to anchor a methodology. Rather, focus must be directed to the very relation between Japan as an empirical entity and our subjective representations of it. At this more general level, prior to any attachment to this or that particular Japanese object, the central question of how the subject of Japan studies constitutes its various objects comes into view with greater clarity. From this vantage point, I believe, it will be possible to better evaluate a scholarship whose critical spirit appears in the compounded form of enhanced political awareness and more probing theoretical insight.

To confront the question of method, one must recognize the insufficiency of treating the subject-object relation in Japan studies in purely

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synchronic terms. This discipline possesses a distinct individual history, and the most effective means of understanding its methodological issues is to study the diverse ways in which these matters have been handed down to us from the past. Of course, the presence of methodological issues in the field can be traced to multiple points outside of Japan studies, but in order to comprehend the manner in which these issues have been reflected and internalized, as it were, one needs to analyze the course of their reception in diachronic fashion. A conceptual history, then, which aims at showing how past attempts at theoretical-critical engagement represent challenges to received frameworks and patterns of thought that continue to confront us in the present. In this sense, one of my principal claims in this book is that the past, in its demise or passing, persistently haunts our research in the present. Because of differences in terminology, references, and objects of inquiry, it is easy to overlook these recalcitrant vestiges of the past. It is precisely in order to shed light on the residual presence of past forms of Japan studies that I have decided to focus on the general question of method. In point of fact, I sought as part of my previous study of Abe Kōbō, *Beyond Nation: Time, Writing, and Community in the Work of Abe Kōbō*, to indicate a certain continuity in methodological approach to this writer between an earlier era of Japan studies and its contemporary form.[2] The present volume aims to extend the scope of this type of inquiry, following philosophical strands in the subfields of both literature and history, so as to ideally bring about an acknowledgment that the problematic conceptual frameworks of the past have not been entirely vanquished but indeed continue to inform much present-day scholarship.[3]

A careful examination of past methodological issues will serve to render more explicit the difficulties that attend our present attempt to place Japan studies on even firmer critical ground. For the concern is that the various appeals to theoretical schools or factions, together with the widespread adoption of a more theoretical vocabulary, might not fully achieve the desired goal of advancing the discipline along the lines of greater ethicopolitical awareness and increased conceptual acuity. Despite the best of intentions, the ghost of an earlier Japan studies, as characterized by Orientalist projections and theoretical naiveté, might still haunt present-day scholarship. My point is that an understanding of the current status of Japan studies might be gained by directing attention to past forms of this discipline with an eye to unearthing, beyond the surface level of theoretical references, certain larger conceptual structures that continue to undergird research. I am aware that a metacritical shift from the study of Japanese objects to an examination

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of the attempts at theoretical objectification on the part of Japan scholars will not be greeted, to say the least, with universal approbation. The field of Japan studies is a small one, and it seems reasonable to expect that my theoretical analyses of the theoretical analyses undertaken by several scholars of literature and history will be seen as mere personal attacks, a sign of individual animus rather than scholarly integrity. This risk will be assumed primarily for two reasons. First, it seems unduly restrictive to conceive of the objects of inquiry in Japan studies as necessarily "Japanese." Precisely by widening the scope of possible objects in this field to include entities that may not be immediately identifiable in such fixed national (cultural, racial, ethnic, etc.) terms, I would like to draw attention to an irreducible level of arbitrariness in the meaning of what is called "Japan." Secondly, my suspicion is that the theoretical turn in Japan studies that began in the 1980s has not sufficiently called into question many of the presuppositions that continue to structure the field. Without a conceptual engagement at this more fundamental level, the incorporation of theoretical research exposes itself to the possibility of mere ornamentation. In many instances of scholarship, the strategic use of a term or proper name can be seen to function as a facile substitute for actual intellectual engagement. It is in order to avoid this trap and investigate those concepts that forcefully govern scholarly inquiry that I have chosen to discuss theoretical readings of the recent past.

From the standpoint of the present, it is impossible to view the past as a simple exteriority. To say that the present is partially a product of the past is to in effect acknowledge that one is oneself internally inhabited or occupied by past forces. In the context of Japan studies, this raises the important question of inheritance. Regardless of whether one desires to or not, or indeed whether one is consciously aware of it or not, contemporary scholars of Japan have already inherited certain conceptual frameworks and modes of thought from the institutional past, and these serve to create a line of diachronic continuity that ensures that Japan studies remains at all times essentially close to itself. At issue here is the elusive notion of reception: does one receive this inheritance from the past passively or actively?[4] If we receive such transmission in a strictly passive sense, then it seems we are condemned to repeat this legacy in more or less the same terms. In this way, individual scholars of Japan studies can be seen to function as conduits in the larger project of institutional replication. The line that began in the past works itself through one's participation in the present to create in turn an even more formidable inheritance for future scholars. In the very *act* of reception, however, the opportunity arises to inflect the

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inheritance differently. Yet such intervention requires that one be able to evaluate the content of this heritage, and such capacity is not necessarily guaranteed in a field that is committed less to conceptual reflection than to the organization and explication of its empirical objects. For the fact remains that the inheritance, despite its apparent grounding in factual knowledge, is indeed conceptual through and through. The field codifies its rules and practices through this medium, and it is only by subjecting these to a rigorous theoretical examination, I believe, that the value of the inheritance can be properly assessed.

In chapter 1, "Remembering Kafka: Between Murakami Haruki and Komori Yōichi," I attempt to clear a kind of path between the famous novelist and the renowned literary critic so that an exchange of ideas might freely take place. Here I am simply repeating Komori's own gesture of creating a dialogue with Murakami as set forth in his polemical 2006 book, *Murakami Haruki ron: 'Umibe no Kafuka' wo seidoku suru* [On Murakami Haruki: A close reading of *Kafka on the Shore*]. As the title makes clear, this work constitutes a response to Murakami's 2002 bestselling novel, *Kafka on the Shore*. It is well known that Murakami is the object of considerable opprobrium from leftist intellectuals in Japan, and Komori's unforgiving treatment of his fiction can be said to mark the zenith (or perhaps nadir) of that trend. While my own view of Murakami is that he is an occasionally entertaining if steadfastly mediocre novelist, I am suspicious of moralistic attempts to regard his work as something akin to evil, as Komori insistently does in his study. Such unflinching confidence in matters of ethics and politics strikes me as antithetical to the very nature of ethicopolitical decisions, for these decisions must take place within time, and the radical difference that "is" time prohibits any stable recourse to rules or precedents upon which to model behavior. From my standpoint, the subject who claims knowledge of what is ethical and what is not represents a very classical form of subjectivism, and philosophy throughout its history has sought to determine man as subject precisely as an attempt to shield him from the incessant contingency and singularity of the world. After tracing this subjectivism back to Komori's early works, I provide my own reading of Murakami's novel in order to demonstrate that the subject is inescapably inscribed within a milieu of spatiotemporal difference that it is unable to fully master.

Chapter 2, "The Double Pull of History and Philosophy: Reading Harootunian," shifts the disciplinary terrain from literature to history by focusing on the wide range of writings by the eminent intellectual historian of modern Japan, Harry Harootunian. One of the great virtues of

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Harootunian's work lies in its persistent engagement with philosophical questions. In a field that views historical inquiry primarily in terms of an objectification of past events, Harootunian recognizes that the elusive force of the past is such that it precedes such objectification, thereby indelibly marking the historian in ways that exceed the epistemology of the traditional subject-object relation. It is because of this insight that Harootunian is drawn to issues of methodology and time. After showing how Harootunian's project is unfortunately misrecognized in the attacks on his work by the scholars David Williams and Andrew Gordon, I provide a close analysis of Harootunian's thinking of the relation between time and space, locating a certain inconsistency. For Harootunian, the time-space binary is provocatively determined along ethicopolitical lines, and I attempt to unravel some of the difficulties that arise as a result of this decision. I then undertake a reading of Harootunian's unreservedly affirmative interpretation of Imamura Shōhei's 1970 film, *Nippon sengoshi: Madamu Onboro no seikatsu* [History of postwar Japan as told by a barmaid], so as to better grasp the nature of his position on ethics and politics. As in my reading of Komori, the general element of time reappears in this context and provides a clue to a certain temptation of prelapsarianism that I detect in Harootunian's work. I conclude the chapter by following the logic of Harootunian's repeated critiques of the philosopher Martin Heidegger. While Harootunian insightfully discovers a rejection of what might be called the messiness of sociality in Heidegger's thought, I argue that his underestimation of the philosopher's notion of ecstatic temporality has powerfully negative consequences for his own attempt to rehabilitate the concept of presence.

While chapter 1 focuses on the work of one of the most influential literary theoreticians in Japan and chapter 2 on the writings of undoubtedly the most theoretically ambitious and astute scholar of Japanese history in North America, for chapter 3 I could find no single figure of similar stature and orientation in the field of Japanese literature in North America. As a result, I decided to consider the research of three major scholars teaching at the most prestigious universities with the aim of identifying their principal theoretical contributions to the discipline. Rather than form three separate chapters, however, I gradually came to recognize a profound level of commonality that joins their otherwise disparate scholarship: the question of subjectivity. Despite considerable differences in their respective research objects, it is the underlying problematic of method that acts as the agglutinative force that allows their work to be regarded as conceptually similar. A methodology centered on the subject will be forced to reduce the

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complexity and multiplicity of the world to the status of object, and in this way a certain essential unruliness of literature will come to be domesticated. The literary text might still be expertly handled according to the dominant conventions of the discipline, but it is undeniable that something of precious conceptual value will be lost.

In the first section of this chapter, "Subjectivity and Retroactivity," I examine Tomi Suzuki's 1996 study of the I-novel, *Narrating the Self: Fictions of Japanese Modernity*. At the methodological level, Suzuki announces that her work represents a radical break from previous I-novel scholarship because she focuses not on textual presence but rather on the untimely act of retroactive reading. While I fully agree with the importance of this move, the notion of retroactivity nevertheless sets loose something like a general disturbance in her text, and Suzuki is forced to arbitrarily—if revealingly—restrict this notion's scope of effectivity to narrow literary phenomena, thus preserving the integrity and substantial presence of Japanese cultural identity. In the next section, "Subjectivity and Binding," I pursue a reading of Alan Tansman's two major works: the 1993 *Writings of Kōda Aya, A Japanese Literary Daughter* and the 2009 *Aesthetics of Japanese Fascism*. For Tansman, the essential core of fascism is determined as binding, or *musubi*, from the original Roman term *fasces*. Binding is fascistic because it threatens what is held to be the primordial unity and identity that defines each individual qua individual. Tansman marshals a wide array of theoretical sources to support his fundamentally subjectivist claim of the sanctity of the individual, and he does not hesitate to criticize such philosophers as Heidegger and the Kyoto School's Nishida Kitarō for what he regards as their quasifascist attacks on individual identity. In a manner similar to my response to Suzuki and her treatment of retroactivity, I show in my discussion of Tansman that this notion of binding must be logically generalized: far from being excluded as the binary contrast of individualism, it functions as the necessary condition upon which a thinking of individuality first becomes possible. The concluding section of the chapter, "Subjectivity and Alterity," develops an analysis of Dennis Washburn's 1995 *The Dilemma of the Modern in Japanese Fiction* together with his 2007 *Translating Mount Fuji: Modern Japanese Fiction and the Ethics of Identity.* I locate in Washburn an underlying paradox whereby his avowed goal of formulating a critique of nationalism is offset by his commitment to a traditional view of spatiality as structured by the duality of inside and outside. As a result, the notion of identity that appears in the title of his later monograph is conceived in such a way that what is seen to be "indigenous" to Japan, as he refers to it, can only be opposed

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to that which is posited as "foreign." This methodological decision, which affirms an inheritance that belongs as much to metaphysics as it does to common sense, is never questioned as such. What is thus foreclosed is the chance to interrogate nationalism at a more fundamental level so as to discover its conceptual complicity with the very establishment of the field of Japan studies.[5]

By way of conclusion, let me express my hope that this book will contribute to a rethinking of some of the most basic premises in Japan studies. The very ubiquity of these premises lends them the value of a common sense so deeply rooted that it often governs our thinking invisibly, without us being explicitly aware of their nature and considerable force. These premises do not originate in us as autonomous subjects but rather precede us; they form part of the tradition of Japan studies that substantially shapes the way research is conducted, inscribing us as part of a longer historical chain and at times bringing us uncomfortably close to those earlier and less exalted instances in the field that we might otherwise insist are now dead and buried. By viewing conceptual thought beyond the level of contingent attachment to an empirical scholarship that is itself held to be unshakably grounded, one uncovers the possibility of more fully opening Japan studies to its outside.

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