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Harry Harootunian: Overcome by Modernity Japan□□

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The Fantasy of Modern Life

ALTHOUGH the Meiji state put into place the infrastructure of a modern capitalist political economy, the economy itself did not grow at a constant speed between the years 1887 and 1920. The time span was punctuated by business cycles and variations produced by the growth process itself and by specific events like the Sino-Japanese War of 1894–1895 and the Russo-Japanese War of 1904–1905. This meant a rather shaky round of spurts and retrenchments, the deflation of the 1880s, subsequent recovery based mainly on the development of textile and traditional handicrafts industries, railway construction, and the stimulus supplied by the Sino-Japanese War. But the decision to switch over to the gold standard in 1897 braked serious expansion, while the Russo-Japanese War boosted the development of heavy engineering industries. The end of the war drove the country into recession and then into a pattern of slow growth again. World War I removed most of Japan's advanced, industrial competitors from both domestic and world markets and thus provided the country with the opportunity to substitute domestically produced goods for imports and to increase exports of manufactures despite the relative backwardness of this sector. The war also signaled the transformation of the industrial base from light to concentrated heavy industries and the ceaseless migration of rural populations to the urban sites of industrial production.

The result of Japan's participation in the war was an unprecedented stimulus in all sectors of the economy, but especially those involving engineering, shipbuilding, machine tools, and electrical engineering. Despite the continuation of growth and slumps in the postwar period, the expansion stimulated by the war lifted the economy to the status of a modern industry. Even though traditional sectors such as agriculture and small businesses would continue to be responsible for producing the bulk of the output and providing employment, by the 1920s the economy's future was firmly rooted in expanding industrial and financial sectors. Critics, along the way, noted the sharp lines of unevenness between newer, modern capital industries and the so-called traditional sectors, which, in the Meiji period, had grown concurrently and even complementarily rather than competitively. But by 1920 and the succeeding years, the sharply silhouetted contrast was widely observed in the uneven relationship between the large metropolitan sites like Tokyo/Yokohama and Osaka/

Kobe, which literally had been transformed overnight, and a countryside that supplied the cities with a labor force and capital but, according to Yanagita Kunio, received nothing in return. By the time of the war, the modern sector had increased so rapidly that it began to conflict with the demands of the traditional economy, which was still supplying most of the consumer's needs. Hence, the relationship was less symbiotic than parasitic, producing the conditions of permanent unevenness and unequal development that were necessary for the continuing expansion of capital industries. Accordingly, the establishment of what economists called a "dual" or "differential" economic structure (euphemisms for unevenness) included a wide range of new technology, productivity, wages, scales of production, profit rates and margins, managerial practices, and forms of industrial manufacturing. Moreover, it brought new classes and an awareness of new identities and subject positions, and it expanded the possibilities for women in the labor market. The sites of modern capital industries required the expansion of the cities, with its migrant armies of new arrivals from the countryside, looking for work and the prospects of new life. The process produced differences in the nature of markets in which products were sold and also supplied much needed capital, labor, new technologies, and managerial skills.

After the early Meiji period, governments employed all powers at their disposal to promote growth in modern capital industries as a national necessity. Yet the program required sacrificing traditional areas of economic activity. By favoring armaments, investment goods, and exports over consumption goods, state policy kept the standard of living lower than they might have been. Between 1885 and 1920, the rise in personal consumption per capita, a rough measure to be sure, was only 67 percent. This very slow increase in the standard of living resulted in political and social strains in the early 1920s and the explosive conflict among expectation, desire, and capability. In the fantasy of everyday modern life, as it was figured in the popular media, the contest was played out in a struggle between desire and value, between the promise of excess and the fear of scarcity.¹

Over the thirty years between 1883 and 1913, agricultural production contributed about 20 percent and other associated traditional activities about 40% to the net national product. By the same token, the modern sector was growing at about two or three times as fast as these sectors but remained at a relatively small scale. Agricultural production after 1900 expanded principally because of the increased land utilization—reclamation, labor, machinery, better fertilizers. But the farm population began to fall slightly but steadily in these years, even though the availability of arable land was increasing. It has been observed, in this connection, that the scale of farming landholders was small. Once legal obstacles to land

transfer were removed, ownership moved toward more concentrated, surplus landowners who found it more beneficial to lease land they could not work to tenants rather than hire agricultural day laborers when needed. As a result, the estimated figures attesting to accelerated tenancy increased to about 45 percent of the farming population by the time of World War I. By 1900 landowners were collecting rents equivalent to almost a quarter of Japan's rice crop. Until the beginning of the war, the share steadily increased to heighten the power of landowners, who could invest their capital (rents) in local enterprises, and whose growing financial status permitted them to enhance their political standing to become a force in national politics. Between 1900 and 1913, the average rate of agricultural production rose to 1.8 percent a year as the farm population fell. As for the putative modern sector before the war, its narrative consisted of showing an order of development inaugurated by light industries, principally textiles, accompanied by mining, attention to the establishment of metallurgical industries, and railways; with the conversion from steam to electric power, it was possible to introduce new, heavy engineering and chemical industries and the mass production of automobiles and other consumer appliances. In the thirty years between 1883 and 1913, the labor force increased from twenty-two to twenty-six million. Even though agriculture employment decreased slightly, the workforce in the modern sector increased fourfold in these years from a modest base of 200,000 in the early 1880s. At the same time, the number of people working in traditional occupations increased by 60 percent and absorbed over three quarters of the increase in the workforce, owing to the preponderant role played by the traditional sector in the overall economy.²

By all accounts, World War I rescued Japan from fiscal collapse and balance-of-trade payments. Until 1913 capital industries such as branches of heavy industry were not profitable in the world market, and Japan was in no position to compete with more developed industrial societies. Moreover, the country had not yet recovered from the expenses of the earlier Russo-Japanese War. But all of this was to change as Japan became a member of the allied coalition but was spared any active involvement in the theater of fighting (excepting small operations in North China and the Pacific Islands). During the war, the economy enjoyed a positive boom and relative prosperity because of its role as a supplier to the allied cause. In Asia, Japan was liberated from trade competitors as its own domestic market was freed from the importation of foreign goods. Similarly, the growth rate was matched by a significant reorganization of international trade and payments, not to mention a spurt in investments. Because Japanese industries were diverted from producing consumer goods, consumption rates were low throughout the war years and wages remained depressed. At the same time, some people profited immeasurably from the

wartime boom, especially investors and speculators. A sign of the new independence of private enterprise from government was the formation of the *zaikai*—a modern business establishment—and the founding of the Industrial Club of Japan in 1917. War's end reintroduced economic normalcy by the 1920s, and the years following witnessed both growth and severe business cycles. Yet, the foundations of modern industry had been firmly implanted; despite the recessionary cycles that plagued Japan in the 1920s, the labor force continued to grow, with women entering new industries in large numbers, and the traditional sector, producing consumer goods for the domestic market, continued at a much slower pace. One of the interesting aspects of the 1920s is that the decade was inaugurated by an economic crash that ended in an even worse one. The decade was punctuated by the Great Kantō Earthquake of 1923, occurring just as the country was climbing out of its economic slump, a disaster that affected seventeen prefectures and principally the city of Tokyo. Approximately 554,000 out of 2.3 million households lost their homes, 105,000 people died, 30,000 were injured, and 250,000 lost their jobs. In the wake of the quake, the gross annual wealth decreased, which meant Japan could not return to the gold standard. Four years later, the nation was confronted by a major financial panic (1927) that resulted in a run on the banks, which had made loans to companies that were not able to repay, prefiguring what was to come in 1929 and 1930. In 1929 Japan was drawn into the grips of a worldwide depression from which it slowly emerged by the middle of the 1930s, when it began its move on China.

By the end of the 1920s, half of the nation's population was agricultural. Since the pace of agricultural productivity was locked in what seemed like a permanent recession, especially after 1925, the quality and standard of living associated with farm life decreased throughout the decade and beyond. Agricultural prices continued a steady decline after 1920, farm incomes remained low relative to other workers, and farms carried an average of 800-900 yen in loans, even though the interests rates were usually quite low. At the same time, the prices of products were also falling. The nonfarming population, in the cities and the countryside, constituted the major segment of the employed population during the 1920s and was involved in traditional and secondary sectors of economic activity. According to Nakamura Takafusa, Japan, because of this differential between modern and traditional sectors, had become a large capitalist nation, with big companies and industries commanding immense power, but according to the population ratio between modern workers and non-modern workers, "the impact of the traditional society remained strong."³

What was striking about these years was the massive urbanization experienced in Tokyo and other cities like Osaka. As an emblem of the new power of cities, the Tokyo Taishō Exhibition Hall was opened in March

1914 in Ueno. The aim of the exhibition hall was to encourage industry and to “confer blessings on the new government.” On the first day the exhibition opened, the Tokyo *Asahi shinbun* reported that “once the exhibition was opened and the public admitted through the front gate . . . fifteen minutes earlier because of the violent crush of spectators, the countless people who had been eagerly waiting were transformed into a tidal wave when they heard that police guards were trying to control entry and surged forward like an avalanche.”⁴ Over six hundred geisha from the city were employed to serve as welcomers at the exhibition booths, and over half of the booths had tags indicating they were sold out. Anyone who turned around the great exhibition hall could not fail to be impressed with its “total image” of economy, culture, and power in Japan at the beginning of the new Taishō era. The head of Tokyo City Assembly and Chamber of Commerce encapsulated this new image of power when he remarked, “In our business world, there are no differences among the human species, no national barriers. We have many people throughout the country, possessing the will, who expect to promote the true spirit, correct society’s wrongs, and reach the citadel of true wealth and power. The economic men occasioned by the great exhibition hall of Taishō are not clan cliques but [are driven by] a free spirit. They endeavor mightily to make a state of true wealth and power.”⁵ The reference to “wealth and power” obviously echoed the earlier Meiji slogan, but the criticism of clan government clearly dramatized how far the state was from actually realizing “true wealth and power.” Plainly, the promoter of the exhibition hall was not the state but rather the city of Tokyo, which already envisaged a different image for Japan.

The Great Exhibition Hall not only symbolized vast changes taking place in economy and politics; it also signified the city as the site of the new political economy. This was materially evident in the shift of population. The Japanese population in the 1880s was approximately thirty-four million; by 1910 it had grown to almost fifty-six million. Among the working population in these years, the number increased from roughly twenty million to about twenty-seven million. The total population grew at an annual rate of 1.6 percent, while the workforce expanded at a slightly lower pace. From the first decade of the twentieth century into the 1920s, the rapid rate of industrialization brought a virtual demographic revolution. But the concomitant growth in the population in heavier and capital industries and the service sectors was also marked and was mainly concentrated in the cities. Those people who migrated to the cities during these years were usually second and third sons of farming families, who had no access to family inheritance, women, and those who were looking for higher wages. (This element became more pronounced when the more or less even development between traditional and modern sectors began

to break down and wages among the latter began to overtake the former.) Despite the steady march of farm migrants to the cities, by 1919 two out of three Japanese still lived in village communities of under ten thousand people or less.⁶

In 1920 the population of Tokyo had reached 3.35 million, more than doubling its size in a little more than two decades; Osaka jumped from 820,000 to 1.25 million; Kyoto, from 350,000 to 700,000; Kobe, from 210,000 to 640,000. Nagoya's 240,000 grew to 610,000, and Yokohama lurched from 190,000 to 570,000. Excluding these six cities, only two cities had a population of more than 100,000 in 1898—Hiroshima and Nagasaki; by 1920 Nagasaki had a population of 180,000, Hiroshima 160,000, Hakodate 140,000, Kure 130,000, Kanazawa 130,000, Sendai 120,000, Otaru 110,000, and Sapporo, Yawata, and Kagoshima 100,000 each, totaling ten. Among cities numbering more than 50,000 people in 1898, six had already reached the 100,000 level by 1920 (Sendai, Otaru, Hakodate, Kanazawa, Kagoshima, and Kure), while others following in suit were Sakai, Niigata, Toyama, Wakayama, Okayama, Fukushima, Fukuoka, and Kumamoto. This narrative was followed down the scale of smaller cities with populations under 30,000. These figures impressed contemporary urbanologists like Sawada Ken, who in 1923 published the essay "Toshi to Hangyaku," which signaled the formation of a discourse on cities aimed at liberating them and their development from the state. But in this essay, Sawada was already prepared to show how the current of history had plainly reflected the intense concentration of population in the cities which, for him, represented an incontestable sign of advancement. What seemed to attract him was the observation that Japan's urbanization compared favorably with that of the world's industrial societies. The United States possessed three cities with populations exceeding one million people—New York, Chicago, and Philadelphia—but Japan was evenly matched in this sector.⁷ Germany only had Berlin; France, only Paris; and England, the "ancestral country of industrialism," no more than the two cities of London and Glasgow. "That Japan has the two cities of Tokyo and Osaka clearly tells the story that it was never behind the civilized countries in population concentration."⁸ Even when looking at large cities with more than 500,000 people, Sawada continued, you will discover the same fact. The five cities of Tokyo, Osaka, Kyoto, Kobe, and Nagoya all exceeded 500,000 people. When compared to European nations like England, there was only London, Glasgow, Birmingham, Liverpool, and Manchester; in France, only Paris and Marseilles, in Germany, Berlin, Hamburg, Munich, and Dresden. Sawada dismissed a prevailing observation that contended that Japan's modern cities were "inferior" in population size and that, as a result, "Japan should not be judged according to European standards. Because the density is different, despite

the similarity of population size, there is a different look among them.”⁹ Sawada contested claims that the density of Japan’s cities was greater than that found elsewhere and went on to show, in detail, that Tokyo was less compact than cities like New York, Paris, and London. Although he complained about the nature of Japan’s cities, he provided forceful evidence and argumentation to demonstrate that Japan’s cities, by 1920, compared favorably with the demographics of other, world-class cities. The same comparative argument could have been made concerning the ratio of rural to urban populations (excepting the United States and possibly England) and the relative similarities in gross national output. What the meteoric growth of cities symbolized was the construction of a modern labor force in Japan (and its concomitant recruitment of women into the labor market) and the relative decline of the agricultural sector, farm labor, and attempts to reinforce rural solidarity and link communities more closely to the state. Even though the Japanese population remained more agrarian than urban through the 1930s, the division between city and countryside was vastly overdetermined in the cultural realm, where the metropolis produced an image of itself as universal while farm life was made to appear as a backwater, languishing in a different temporality.

There were, for our purposes, two factors that stamped the character of the accelerated growth of Japan’s cities: massive migration and the formation of a women’s labor force. The demographic development was supplemented by an accounting of people who had actually left their place of household registration (*koseki*). What these figures show is the effect of mass migration from the countryside to the cities and the consequences it held for the family system as it had been defined by the Meiji Civil Code. Qualitatively, urbanization in the 1920s undermined the political and social solidarity of the family. Yanagita Kunio early observed, in his *Meiji Taishōshi, sesōhen*, that the incessant flow of people into the cities produced an estranged life. “The loneliness of life in the early days of the city,” he wrote, “depended on making people into travelers, yearning for families long absent. But the effect of too much importance on one’s home village was that the cities were filled with residents that were not attached to anything, anywhere.”¹⁰ His contemporary, the detective story writer Edogawa Rampo, made these alienated strangers of the city the subject of a number of his stories and attributed the commission of bizarre crimes to their socially anomic experience. The story “*Dzaka no satsujin jiken*” (Murder in D Hill) showed both the centrality of the streets and the loneliness of recent arrivals to the great city. The opening of the story has the protagonist meditating on his new, unfamiliar surroundings:

It was a hot, steamy night in early September and I was sipping ice coffee in a favorite cafe called the White Plum on a broad street in D Hill. At the time, I had only recently left school and had not yet found a job. I laid around the

boarding house and even read some books. When I lost interest in reading, I went on aimless walks. Sometimes I made the round of coffee shops that weren't too pricey and this became a daily routine. The White Plum was close to the boarding house and whenever I went out for a walk it was usually the first place I'd go into. Somehow I got into the bad habit of overstaying whenever I entered this coffee shop.¹¹

With nothing to do and no friends, the protagonist of this story, like many others, is cast afloat in the urban flow of strangers who simply wander the streets with no explicit purpose. In this story, it is interesting to note that Rampo has his protagonist suddenly spot somebody he knew from a former life.

If writers like Yanagita and Rampo reported the qualitative effects of the mass migration into the cities (and the former's *Meiji Taishōshi, sesōben* and more analytic *Toshi to Nōson* [1929] are filled with such observations), its quantitative dimensions were analyzed by a variety of social researchers, like Kagawa Toyohiko and Andō Masayoshi in their *Nihon dōtoku tōkei yōran* (Statistical survey Japanese morality, 1934) and Toda Teizō, who in 1938 published his analysis of the first national census, taken in 1920. With Kagawa, a social gospel Christian, and Andō, we have a mix of statistics and moral judgments: the marshaling of figures and data showing the large number of farm women who had migrated to the cities in the preceding decade to service their pleasure zones, and stinging moral condemnation of the government for having encouraged the unregulated expansion of prostitution and the destruction of traditional rural life. Toda's work was less moralistic but nevertheless pointed to the social consequences of the immense numbers of people who had left their place of registration. Even by 1920, the status of population distribution had already captured the attention of the state as a problem that needed to be understood. Within a total population of nearly 56 million, approximately 10 percent lived apart from their families in 1920. But if seen in the light of the working population of approximately 27 million, the figure for those who had left their families was even larger. What seemed difficult for Toda to gauge was the observation that the figure for large cities like Tokyo and Osaka was probably larger than the national ratio. Assuming that if two out of every three Japanese still lived in the countryside in 1920, most of these people would have been registered in *koseki*. If one-third of the population was living in the cities, say 18 million people, and if 10 percent of the national population were now outside of their registered households, then it was possible to assume that most of these people were probably residing in the cities. This would mean that the majority of the 5,747,000 (the 10 percent) were occupants of the cities, approximately a third of the urban population. According to Toda,

even a tenth of the total population was considerable, and one could only guess at the pace of subsequent migrations and departures from places of registration. In a population of a thousand, 108 people lived outside their family life. In Tokyo, 630,000 city folk, or 27 percent, were separated from their ancestral households.¹² These people lived as service employees, domestic servants, and so forth. As for ages, the majority were in their late teens and early twenties.

Still another measure of this phenomenon was the average size of ordinary households that excluded separated members: 4.5 people nationally, 3.7 for Tokyo, and 3.5 for Osaka. In provinces like Aomori and Iwate, Toda found that 60 percent of households had at least five members. For cities like Tokyo and Osaka, this figure was lower, and households rarely exceeded three members. Hence, the trend, even by 1920, was toward smaller households with fewer personnel, as attested by the media blitz promoting new forms of consumption and new commodities for the nuclear family of the “culture houses” (*bunka jūtaku*). What emerged from Toda’s analysis was the beginning of the dismantling process of large households and the progressive installation of the nuclear family in Japan’s large cities. By the same measure, his analysis pointed to greater possibilities for isolation and alienation, what Rampo described as a “thinning out” of social relationships. What sustained growth after the postwar boom were poor farming families who supplied a seemingly inexhaustible reservoir of cheap labor to feed industry’s desiring machine. The migration of second and third sons and daughters, as already suggested, contracted the size of households in the countryside and led to the formation of smaller units in the cities. If this pattern of migration legitimated the patriarchal system by limiting inheritance, the new life in the cities, for both men and women, constantly flew in the face of these constraints and practices to create ceaseless social strain and lived contradictions.

In this respect, women entered the workforce in large numbers in the postwar years. Until 1930 factory hands were predominately women, whereas workers in the nonmanufacturing sector were largely male. Yet, if the figures of Kagawa and Andō are to be believed, tens of thousands of young women streamed into the “pleasure zones” to staff their large entertainment quarters, cafes, coffee shops, bars, dance halls, and theaters, and to service the sex trade. The Marxist critic Hirabayashi Hatsu-no-suke was close to the truth when, in the mid 1920s, he pointed to the progressive “feminization of culture.” Aware that large numbers of women had already become factory workers, many actively involved in left-wing labor activity, Hirabayashi observed that women could be seen and heard everywhere in Tokyo, as office workers, phone operators, bank tellers, bus conductors, and so forth.¹³ Kagawa and Andō estimated that in 1924 there were a little more than 50,000 prostitutes throughout the

country servicing an average of two to three men daily. The total number of yearly revelers was approximately 22 million, and the yearly average of clients for a prostitute was about 441 in 1933. This figure referred to licensed or registered prostitutes but did not include the vast army of unlicensed and informal sex workers who worked in cafes, bars, and restaurants, which would have made the numbers higher, especially in the larger cities where most of this activity was concentrated. To add weight to this assumption, Kagawa and Andō pointed out that the existence of “special restaurants” (*tokushu inshokuten*) increased exponentially after the middle 1920s and replicated the pattern of growth in cafe bars and coffee shops that recruited large numbers of women from both countryside and the city, including “children of the fallen middle class,” the group Aono Suekichi was to eulogize.¹⁴ All of these businesses simply “hastened . . . the supply to satisfy the requirements of those who pursue sexual desire.”¹⁵

Women accounted for almost 35 percent of Japan’s total employment in all industries. Between 1920 and 1930, more than half of all factory workers were women, even though the ratio was reversed in the succeeding decade with the establishment of newer industries that demanded higher-skilled workers. Koji Taira has argued significantly, and persuasively, that Japan’s economic modernization, which meant the implementation of the factory system after the war, was “manned by women.”¹⁶ In his thinking, the economic and technological advances in the process of capitalist modernization were sustained by the relative backwardness of the labor force, numerically dominated by women and girls, and the retention of low wages. Factories, representing the newer, modern sector of the economy, were promoted as the sign of capitalist progress, and this privilege linked factory employment to the gendered composition of the workforce. But, as Taira reminds us, women workers did not enjoy any special advantages by participating in the industrialization process, apart from winning some economic independence and social autonomy. Like they were for the scores of women and girls that poured into the service sectors, low wages were apparently the price for independence. These women suffered from long working days, without rest and holidays, depressed wages, and a wide variety of health hazards. (Kagawa and Andō pointed to the relationship between the social evils of prostitution and health risks among sex workers, which paralleled a comparable experience among female factory workers.) Despite the implementation of legislation from 1911 on, designed to improve the working conditions of women and children, progress came slowly, and the major problems of depressed wages and unhealthy conditions continued to plague women factory workers. By the middle 1920s, when Japanese industrialism was beginning to move to a new stage of development characterized by the establishment of firms

requiring higher technical proficiency from workers, the demand for skilled male labor increased as the wage differential between men and women widened. According to Taira, new employment practices were instituted that prefigured a “Japanese Employment System” and the effort to stabilize the relationship between capital and labor, management and workers in a historical conjuncture marked by incessant labor disputes, strikes, and mobilization in both the cities and the countryside.¹⁷ It was at this point that the increasing demand for male workers began to drive large numbers of women into the informal and service sectors, such as small shops, stores, and cafes. But this numerical preponderance of women in the modernization process and the life they lived in the cities—financially independent, socially autonomous, and politically active—overdetermined in discourse the figure of the *modan garū* (modern girl), and the exaggerated threat to the settled conceptions of patriarchally dominated relationships (authorized by law) as well as the effort of mass media to reassert the integrity and stability of the household unit by enforcing the traditional role ascribed to wife and mother (however modernized they were materially). These “modern girls” became the heroes of this new, feminized culture announced by Hirabayashi. The new modern life was figured first in discourse, as fantasy, before it was ubiquitously lived as experience, and its major elements were independent women, commodities, and mass consumption. What this fantasizing discourse inadvertently inspired was not only the fear of progressive social disorder and conflict but also the growing sense that the processes guaranteeing cultural reproduction (not to forget biological reproduction) were in danger of disappearing altogether. If the formation of mass culture produced overdetermination as the historical sign of the crisis of social indeterminacy, the modern girl was its contemporary trope.

The expanding metropolitan sites like Tokyo and Osaka supplied a vast space for discourse to imagine and figure a new form of life, a place for fantasizing what had not yet become a lived reality for all. Yet even as a fantasy of “modern life,” it was able to dramatize the production of desire inspired by a new life promising new commodities for consumption, new social relationships, identities, and experience. What the metropolis produced first, then, was a social discourse of everyday modern life, often called *bunka seikatsu* (cultural living) by contemporaries, that constantly announced itself in mass media like popular magazines, newspapers, advertisements, radio, and movies, pointing to the ceaseless changes in material life introduced by new consumer products and a conception of life vastly different from the rhythms of received, routine practices. Discourse continuously pointed to the succession of events and looked to the future, as the making of constant eventfulness became the principal

commodity of newspapers and popular magazines, not to forget radio, and the progressive fragmentation and destabilization of cultural forms. Yet this reflexive discourse, formulated in the immediate postwar period and linked to the prospect of international peace and peacetime industrial production and consumption provoked by the appearance of new forms of everyday life, was more important than the actual ubiquity of the new modern life itself. It pointed to an evolving historical situation—something that was occurring in social practice and would continue to do so—and often prefigured and preceded the widespread establishment of commodity culture in Japan and its regime of new subjectivities and social relationships. In other words, more than reflecting a historical reality already in place in the 1920s, it figured a fantasy life that demanded to be fulfilled.¹⁸ As such, this discourse on everyday “modern life” (*modan raifu*, as it was sounded out in Japanese), what the Marxist philosopher Tosaka renamed, at the time, as the “quotidianization of thought” because he was convinced its message emanated from the lived experience of a new constituency called the “people” (*minshū*) and the “masses” (*taishū*), was more futuristic and anticipatory of a different kind of society, fascinated yet capable of prompting dread and anxiety. Others, as we shall see, saw the shape of even worse things to come in the commodified inscriptions of the new life as they fled to the safety of traditional cultural shelter. It was the dread of mass culture and consumption in the 1920s (not to mention the specter of mass politics) and its threat to unhinge older, fixed social relationships and subjectivities that led to the formation of a secondary discourse on the social aimed at representing the essence of society and performing a virtual poeticizing or aestheticizing of everydayness in order to negate the divisions, fragmentation, and conflict that had instituted society in Japan.

If, as Max Weber observed immediately after World War I, bureaucratic rationality would dominate everyday life to form a seamless fit between political power and the social lifeworld, Japanese thinkers and critics tried to offset this eventuality by returning to the older equation that identified life with art and culture. Both the left and the right participated in this secondary discourse on the social and pressed their respective claims for defining the meaning of everyday life: the left seeking to construct a conception of modernity rooted in an analysis of the phenomenological present that would avoid reducing all historical epochs to capital but still be capable of retaining it as a moment in a larger historical process not yet completed and whose outcome lay in the future; while conservatives, Japan’s version of “modernists against modernity,” anxiously looked to locate a space whose recovery would fulfill historic cultural models outside of history itself. This move entailed finding a refuge from what many perceived as an inauthentic social life of capitalism for a ground of authen-

tic knowledge capable of establishing a society without history within the heart of historical society, or, as Slavoj Žižek described it later, “capitalism without capitalism.”

The new “cultural living” advertising the advent of new forms of consumption, living, and experience seized hold of society immediately after World War I. Countless new journals, newspapers, and films presented this new conception of life as it unfolded in the space of the streets—streets that were beginning to become more important than the things they actually linked together. Recognition of the establishment of a new everydayness was, in part, dramatized by the government itself, which soon after the war began to promote what was called a “daily life reform movement” (*seikatsu kaizen undō*) or the “simple life movement” (*shinpuru raifu undō*) inspired by a French best-seller, *La vie simple* (1917), a translation of an American book. The purpose of this movement was to insure the government’s control over the new modern life that was being imagined in popular media and to implement a program that would emphasize efficiency and economies yet encourage people to avoid excess and immersing themselves too deeply in the new commodity culture. The opening of the Peace Exhibition Hall in 1923 not only linked its celebration of the virtues of global peace and harmony to the encouragement of industry, it offered a living display of the new cultural living. Its meaning was even more important as it emphasized the importance of a culture of peaceful consumption against a tradition of militaristic production.¹⁹ Prefixing life and living with the word for culture—*bunka*—pointed to how life itself was now identified with culture, when before it had not been, and the extent to which production and lived experience were decoupled.

What lay behind this official recognition of a transformation exclusively promoting commodity production and new possibilities for consumption—at least for the middle classes—was a widely shared conviction about the necessity of encouraging the adoption of rationality, efficiency, and economies in the conduct of social life. The Ministry of Education in 1920, apparently still reeling from the recent “rice riots” and now attempting to avoid comparable conflict in the future, issued a proclamation calling for greater diversity in food consumption and proposing the importance of ending the centrality of rice in the Japanese diet.²⁰ Yet this call was expanded to include new regulations regarding housing and the consumption of utilities that would lead to the protection of lower-class families. The “simple life” enunciated by the state referred to rationalization, and a new culturally lived experience was identified with Western style. Although cultural life targeted the city “salaryman” and his family, it was concentrated first on the production and consumption of commodities for family use. The forum for these commodities was

the department store, which developed rapidly in these years and made available the permanent display of household consumer goods. Not always restricted to the presentation of expensive, high-quality goods, department stores like Mitsukoshi offered cheaper goods in annexes in Marunouchi, like “Cotton Day.”²¹ While this rationalization of household life had been encouraged from the top, the desire for consumption quickly spread beyond any possible control or regulation to reach all sectors of Japanese society and ultimately exceeded the constraints of marginal utility (rationality and economies) envisaged by its promoters. If department stores offered a permanent display of “modern life,” popular discourse (and advertisements) kept the spectacle of endless consumption constantly before the population. Cultural living, however limited politically and socially at the time of its inception, became a cultural unconsciousness for Japanese living in the cities. More than anything else, it dramatized the immense difference between the old and the new. “The economy of the older period privileged production,” intoned a contemporary explanation, “and the worker was compelled to sacrifice his life because of this. In the new age, it is clear that consumption now accompanies production and is opposed to the sacrifices the worker was forced to make. We have to take the advancement of life seriously.”²²

The house and the household were at the heart of this transformation. It was in the household, according to a later account (1924), that health, morality, peace and harmony, activity and mental serenity of the whole family were managed. It must progress as society progresses. “Feudal houses,” as such, “were not only difficult to situate in contemporary life but were tremendously injurious to the progress of society today. . . . A house unifies inasmuch as it simplifies life.”²³ But we should note that the central thrust of “cultural living” and its emphasis on the consumption of household commodities disclosed the degree to which the state, in its inaugural efforts to move from mere (military) production to (commodity) consumption, targeted women as the principal subject. Indeed, consumption, from the very beginning, was closely identified with women and was thus gendered to a degree that explains why the primary figure and ideologue of the 1920s and early 1930s was the *modan garū*. This gendering of consumption worked in such a way as not simply to overdetermine the figure of the modern woman and the putative dangers she posed to settled forms of patriarchal order and reproduction but, strangely, to equate the promotion of scientific knowledge and rationality with the feminization of culture. The move to “cultural living” seemed to identify modernity itself with the status of women consumers who were being enjoined, in new magazines like *Shufu no tomo* (Housewife’s friend) and *Kagaku chishiki* (Scientific knowledge), not to mention more middle-brow periodicals like *Josei* (Woman) and *Fujin kōron* (Women’s opinion),

to name only the better known publications, to become rational and informed consumers of products that would enhance and improve the life and health of the household. Even though the major goal was to make women into rational custodians of the household political economy, the effects of this process could not simply be limited to preserving the family as the primary, solidary social unit. This gendering of consumption in the early 1920s meshed quickly with the phenomenon of large numbers of women who were entering the labor force and undoubtedly contributed to contemporary descriptions announcing the establishment of a “feminine culture.”²⁴

The marks of this new culture were Western clothing, cosmetics, and the beauty salon. What the rationalization of household life required, as a concretization of “cultural living,” was a change of the position of women in the household political economy. It not only announced the end of the seclusion and isolation women had experienced as virtual prisoners of the household, it had consequences for their status outside of family life, as larger numbers began pouring into the labor force, especially in those areas like learning, education, and sports that had been male preserves. In this sense, the experience of rationalizing everyday life with efficient and cheaply made consumer items, promoted to encourage greater solidification of family life, especially in the new environment of the cities where its size diminished, led to a transformation of the role occupied by women and a reorganization of the relationship between their private (enclosed) and public (open) worlds. In the process of assuming responsibility for reorganizing everyday life according to new standards of efficiency and economies, women acquired a new sense of subjectivity (when before it had been exceedingly weak) that took them outside of the household to become principal actors in the drama of modernity. The figure of the “modern girl” and “kissing girl,” represented as a flapper, portrayed by Tanizaki’s Naomi (*Chijin no ai*), who was made to resemble the movie actress Mary Pickford, an exaggerated personification of the independent female flapper projected by the Hollywood dream factory, was the overdetermined figure that signified both the changes women had already experienced and the aspirations they sought to realize. But this figure also disclosed both fear of the threat she posed to settled conceptions of civil order and the possibility of a gender war. In Japan during the 1920s and early 1930s, the true other of modernity was not so much the worker but woman. The surfacing of sharp gender distinctions and the claims associated with them constituted, along with the recognition of class divisions constantly kept alive by the left, a threat to order of such magnitude that it became an unstated spur to the production of cultural theory that sought to uphold received practices of reproduction (both cultural and biological) that were made to appear gender neutral. Despite

Kuki Shūzō's celebration of feminine design and articles of clothing in the late Edo period, there is nothing about his theory of culture to suggest that he had embraced the prevailing view that characterized the 1920s as the time of a feminization of culture. By the same measure, Orikuchi's female chanters of archaic rituals did not signify acceptance of the new role played by women in the interwar period. In fact, most cultural theory seemed to be purposely mute on questions of gender, as well as class, and sought to present an image of Japan that was marked neither by social divisions nor by gender difference and sexual differentiation. Precisely because most cultural and communitarian theory remained silent on gender especially, which I suspect was seen as an even greater threat to social order than the specter of class conflict because it struck at the heart of a conception of reproduction, the fear of new gendered aspirations was the driving force behind the effort to present a view of national life that was whole, unblemished by division and harmonious, where, as Yanagita proposed, there was only the "ordinary and abiding folk," *jōmin*.

For Japanese, modernity was speed, shock, and the spectacle of constant sensation. These qualities were often exaggeratedly symbolized in the discourse of the popular media as new subjectivities like the modern girl, the "Marxist boy," the kissing girl, and the cafe waitress; the force of its ubiquity was conveyed by advertisements proclaiming new household products like irons, phonographs, radios, and kitchen-labor devices. According to the contemporary *Kokumin nichijō ōkagami* (Great mirror of national everyday life), a publication constantly admonishing people to consume the new, the "economics of the family was centered in the kitchen and its high economies had great influence."²⁵ Moreover, the list of consumer items was almost endless, privileging Western-style skirts and trousers, new, Western foods and modes of preparation, the new "culture houses," toys for middle-class children, and so on, all promising "convenience," "utility," and "economies." With these commodities, and the necessity of consuming them, came the acquisition of new identities that traversed class, gender, and sexuality, even though it seems evident that women were originally targeted as the subject of commodity consumption. In the post-World War I period, the site of this explosion of modern life was the metropolitan center, and its primary constituencies, especially after the earthquake of 1923, were the masses who worked in the urban industries, consumed its products, and played on its streets. In fact, the discourse on everyday modern life was really about life on the streets where, as the urban ethnographer Kon Wajirō observed in countless studies conducted in the 1920s and early 1930s, innumerable identities were being played out daily on every street corner where people could assume different subject positions by the way they held and smoked cigarettes, dressed, styled their hair, and walked, and by the choices they made for

play and consumption in the Ginza. Life on the streets constantly externalized the power of desire and the way people enacted their innermost fantasies as if they were on a large and endless theater stage. The Iwanami publishing house, announcing a forthcoming series of cheaply priced books aimed at the consuming “people” (*minshū*), declared its hope to “liberate immortal books which have been the life of study and research of the few and put them in the hands of the people who stand in every nook and cranny of the streets.”²⁶

This linking of the streets and the new constituency of the people emblemized Japan’s new modern life. People who poured into the streets were made conscious that they, in fact, were the people, the *minshū*, and, as Tosaka perceptively observed, their activities had “quotidianized” all thinking. The word for street, *gaitō*, surfaced in the 1920s and was immediately identified with city folk who were colonizing and consuming its offerings. For Japanese living in the cities during the 1920s, words like *gaitō* and *minshū* entered into the lexicon of commonly uttered buzzwords that were used everywhere in speech and the writing of the popular, mass media, called *ryūkōgo*, and came to be associated with dynamically progressive and fast-moving people on the streets, consuming new products and forms of entertainment. As one writer put it, the Oriental tradition of sacrifice and struggle was getting weaker, and people were turning increasingly to the “pleasuring of daily life. . . . Like eating cooked rice when famished, drinking water when thirsty, pleasure has become an important part of the real and actual life of the people.”²⁷

In Japan, no less than in industrializing societies like France, Germany, and Italy, as memory of the war receded and the harsh sacrifices exacted by two earlier wars with China and Russia faded, the heroism of production was being replaced by heroic consumption. What resulted was not so much a clash between newer and established values as a struggle of desire against values in general. For ordinary people in the 1920s, the “pluck of Meiji” and the obsession with “rising in the world” (*risshin shusse*) (as Earl Kinmonth has so aptly described this earlier petit bourgeois ideology, “making it”) that seemed to encapsulate so much of the Meiji march to realize “wealth and power” and encourage endless deprivation gave way to the search for comfort and pleasure, leisure and play. The pleasures offered by a new consumption culture—the “philosophy of fun” (*goraku no tetsugaku*) coined and celebrated by the social critic Gonda Yasunosuke—and the production of a social discourse defining everyday modern life on the streets may have overstated its reach as a widespread reality and concealed the observable fact that it was restricted to the urban middle class (at least before the earthquake). Nevertheless, it still attested to social practices and a lived history that would trouble critics searching for meaning as they confronted signs of social

indeterminacy, fragmentation, and conflict. Many early recognized that in the power of desire to inspire endless consumption and to offset fixed values lay a challenge to settled relationships. Almost immediately, criticism surfaced to call attention to the baleful consequences of the quest for materiality, its ostentation and self-indulgence, and especially its effects on work and reproduction, and to demand the reinstatement of “spiritual values” in everyday life. In the wake of the earthquake, the idea of “heaven’s punishment” (*tenkan*) circulated to indicate how opulence and frivolity needed to be reconsidered and how modern customs constituted an “omen” of catastrophe. Elegant goods and expensive products were “valueless before heaven’s punishment” as life must be lived simply and the venerable classic *I ching* consulted for the reading of signs.²⁸ From Tsubouchi Shōyō’s early (1906) anticipation of a daily life suffused with spiritual values of the highest order to Abe Jirō’s reworking of *allgemein bildung*—personal moral and cultural cultivation—there was no lack of thoughtful and anxious concern for the growing importance of desire (materiality) and the eclipsing of spirituality. Others, in this vein, were reminded of the unevenness of development between city and countryside, how even in the cities people were living in mixed cultural registers, and how the past still interacted with the new in the present—how past, as William Faulkner once said, was not yet past.

Hence, the streets, which had existed earlier in Edo and other cities, were now transformed into public spaces to stage acts of consumption and realize new identities. When juxtaposed to the household, the street was the place of activity and independence. The household, for men, was seen as a sanctuary of retreat and relaxation, the seat of patriarchy that protected and nourished children. Opposed to this sense of privacy, seeking to make invisible the wife/mother, as well, was the workplace, which represented the site of business and production. As a public place, it incorporated men into its machinery and made them aware of the necessity of working for wages to continue to maintain the household refuge. Only the streets were truly open and offered the stage for people to become free, to realize their desire. In this regard, the “dance place” (*odoriba*) was a platform between the household and the workplace and consciously seen as the place of freedom.²⁹ Once large-scale business and industrial sites were established, it became increasingly difficult to combine workplace and household. Large numbers of people were thus thrown daily into the streets, shuffling between home and firm or factory, as wage earners. But this daily mixing of large numbers of people using the streets to get to one place or another instilled the idea of street life that combined both the mixed and the different.³⁰ Moreover, only social discourse, as we shall see, was able to totalize the scene of the streets and see it as the whole of what was happening in the modern lives of the people. The

streets, accordingly, offered the opportunity to constantly defamiliarize and refamiliarize a scene that people took for granted. Once resituated in a conception of a totality, or social whole, the familiar gave way to new and different conceptions of the lived experience. That is to say, the street led to envisioning the social. Yet it is important to add that the street, in an entirely opposing direction, was the place dominated by the commodity form, which worked to homogenize and standardize life into a customized existence, seeking constantly to dissolve the very difference and heterogeneity it made possible.

Nevertheless, like the quiet and familiar street scene portrayed by the Portuguese poet Fernando Pessoa, which suddenly and unexpectedly explodes to show its difference, or even Tokunaga's noisy and chaotic avenue that comes to a screeching halt because of the entry of an imperial personage, what was a moment ago familiar is now changed, disclosing its "disquiet." When the countless passers-by of the streets of Tokyo are looked at as students preparing for jobs, salarymen returning home, the unemployed constantly looking for something, the lumpen who seem to have no fixed location, revelers, housewives, and so on, the scene changes into something unfamiliar. In a certain sense, it is precisely this difference and heterogeneity of class, gender, and sexuality that marked the streets that Yanagita Kunio tried to efface with his conception of *jōmin*, the indefinite and unmarked "ordinary and abiding folk."

It is interesting to note that the later discussants of modernity disparagingly looked back on the preceding two decades and the formation of mass culture as the time of Americanization, the film, and Fordist processes of production. Often they dismissed it as "hedonistic" and "crass" materialism, hopelessly superficial when contrasted to the historical culture of Europe, even though it had derived from it—a materialism that had no other purpose than the circulation of commodities and the reproduction of consumption. Contemporaries, like the Marxist critic Ōya Sōichi, condemned "modern custom" (*modansō*) as superficial and diluted, while others acknowledged its vitality and promise. As early as 1918, the influential opinion journal *Chūō kōron* ran a special issue on modernity that sought to identify the "symbolic currents of the new age" and found them in the "image of the automobile," the "moving pictures," and the "cafe." A decade later, the playwright Kikuchi Kan declared that "true modernity, made in Japan, was just beginning," and proof of this lay in the appearance of what he called "new women and men" announcing the "birth of a new human being." In this historical conjuncture, Uchida Roan, a critic, reported that "after the war, the cream of milk skimmed off in department stores and movie pictures was American capitalism," which he later described as an "essential something that had caught the public spirit."³¹ It is important to note here that the whole spectacle of

American life entering Japan was grasped by the eye and was made to appeal directly to vision, as attested to by the popularity of American film.³² The Marxist literary critic Hirabayashi Hatsunosuke observed that

even Japan had become a complete vassal state of Hollywood. Even if you go to a rural cinema, at least one American film will be on the program. In the cities we can see movie houses that specialize in featuring Western films, the majority of them being American, and observe large numbers of fans who do not view anything but Western cinema. . . . Comedy and action, which are the principal forms of American cinema, have rapidly changed the life of Japan today. From the outfit of the cafe waitress to the uniform of the boy scout, there is nothing that has not been influenced by the film. Harold Lloyd spectacles and striped trousers are directly related to fashions in hair cutting and the movies. But its most extreme product was undoubtedly the modern girl and modern boy. It can't be said they were unrelated to Western whiskey and the cafe, the dance hall and the movies.³³

While the older imports of European culture had been channeled through print media, American life style, which became the cultural dominant after the war, and especially the earthquake, signaling the quickening of quantitative production and consumption, was displayed directly in film and centered on the pleasures of buying, entertainment, and sports. What caught Uchida's attention was how American capitalism, through its leading products, had come to dominate everyday life in Japan by offering a powerful image of how it was being lived elsewhere. The poet Satō Haruo in 1919 advised contemporaries that the West was genuinely important and that the film was equal to the "opening of the country" in the "cultural history of Japan," especially the "action film."³⁴ It was this image of "American life style," as it was increasingly called, that found its way into newspapers and magazines. Kikuchi Kan, participating in a roundtable discussion published by *Modan Nippon* (Modern Japan) in 1930, asserted that the "modern of our young era will be intellectual. It is because we will call as the now the modern with respect to life style."³⁵ Here, "intellectually modern" undoubtedly referred to utopianism, new forms of representation, abstract art, and functionalism, but it was manifestly evident that what momentarily constituted modern life was an Americanism that overwhelmed the claims of high art and thought. Ideas were being replaced by things, as the arc of consumption swung widely to accommodate the masses. Some, like Yanagisawa Ken, however, were convinced that motion pictures had great cultural influence on Japanese society because they "imposed a Westernization of depth rather than one of surfaces," inverting the worries of the novelist Natsume Sōseki's seething denunciation of the surface culture of the West that Japanese had hurriedly imported and that threatened the country with the prospect of a

nervous breakdown in the near future.³⁶ But, now, according to another observer of the scene, the people might spend a lot of time laughing in movie houses, but “they still understood well the thing called the West.”³⁷ “My favorite among the symbols of modernity,” wrote Satō Haruo, “is the motion pictures. When I reflect on them, I feel duty bound to live in the present.”³⁸ And Kikuchi Kan, perhaps the most astute recorder of the contemporary scene, confessed that “even though one watches continuously for four or five hours a day, one always does so cheerfully.”³⁹ He would gladly watch anything with a Western content rather than sit through a film dealing with Japan. The film critic Tsumura Hideo observed that the American film had swept through Asia and reached even the “natives” of Southeast Asia, not to forget the backlands of Kyushu and Shikoku. What accounted for this sweeping success was both its presentation of a world of commodities—“cultural life”—and the observable fact that American films were usually westerns and slapstick comedies that had little dialogue and could easily be understood by large numbers of people. As a leading industry exporting a product, film was not just a sign of capitalism; it also put on display commodity culture produced by American capitalism, lived and experienced by its principal subjects, modern men and women.

In its capacity to deterritorialize, capitalism simply “undermined every fixed social identity” and produced innumerable new subject positions all challenging the fixity of received traditional roles.⁴⁰ Novelists like Tanazaki Junichirō, Kawabata Yasunari (particularly in *Asakusa kurenaiden*), and especially Edogawa Rampo explored new sexual identities and their consequences for settled social relationships. In discourse, “all seemed captivated by the modern girl, and were drawn to her hairstyle, clothing, attitudes, facial and bodily movements, and the way of walking.”⁴¹ The figure of the modern girl was symbolized by the short skirt worn above the knees, Louise Brooks haircut, rouge, and lipstick; she appeared as a woman who “struts through the throngs” signifying both sexual and financial independence. A vastly exaggerated image, to be sure, but one that worked to dramatize the limits or extremities of new behavior and the excitement and danger it elicited. A special issue of *Fujin kōron* (“Miscellaneous Views of the Modern Girl,” January 1928) proposed that the image of the modern girl was a complete copy influenced by American action films. “The modern girl is not intellectually modern,” one participant announced, “but only modern from the standpoint of feeling.”⁴² Others denounced this image as a sign of decline, a “poisonous vapor,” the “thick falsehood of cosmetics.” But despite the consensual clamor portraying the modern girl as a danger, writers like Kikuchi Kan pointed to these “new women” as representatives of a new sexual awakening and declared that their appearance announced the beginning of modernity in

1927. “Young women,” he wrote “have become unusually empowered at this time and they . . . are able to ‘cross swords’ with men in matters of love.” Kikuchi, who had already written about such women in his fiction, was attesting to the prominence of these liberated women in areas such as work and sexuality, which had once been in the grip of the patriarchal system. Uchida Roan recognized the genuinely erotic behavior of the modern girl in her bodily movements and language, in the manner of “pouting” and even “scowling” that “elicited widespread emulation” and imitation. He also observed that “it would be difficult to understand the modern girl and boy without seeing American movies.” Kitazawa Hideichi, writing in *Josei* (August 1925), asserted that the “younger generation respects women who are spiritually independent, aware that they are humans equal to males, rather than women who misuse the power of the weak and are defeated. If the young people of the new age pursue femaleness that possesses such a tendency and attitude, they will not have to look outside the group of modern girls.”⁴³ In this statement, Kitazawa listed the special qualities of these modern girls: (1) respect for the self or a consciousness that they were equal to men, a sense of femaleness liberated from the idea of traditional morality and causality; (2) they are born free in nature and need not go through any special process of intellectual awakening. For this reason, they are already empowered to act and thus transcend established morality.

Despite the idealized nature of this overdetermined figure of the girl, it was not all fantasy. Critics like Hirabayashi and Chiba Kameo perceived in this idealized discussion the signs of genuine material social forces and change that undergirded the emergence of the modern girl. Chiba, for example, who looked at the temperament of change of not only the modern girl but also contemporary women as a whole, saw in the transformations of women’s life style prompted by the acquisition of personal income and economic independence a momentous social event that already pointed to fundamental structural mutation. “The numbers of young women who were already drawing salaries from employment had suddenly increased to over seven million. Because these [women] draw pay checks by themselves, they now can be seen freely [attending] even plays. As for what the modern girl is or whether she is a luxury, whether they are people signifying a trend that is deteriorating or one that is luxurious, it is because they have increased so much.”⁴⁴ The view that there are followers of the modern girl among the daughters of the bourgeoisie is the “priceless indication” that attaches the growth of the modern girl to the increase of women in the labor force. In this regard, Hirabayashi, envisaged the progress of mechanization and the revolutionizing of technology as the context for the formation of the modern girl. A champion of technological progress, Hirabayashi believed that cinema imparted the

most significant influence on the development of “modernism” and constituted the sign of a new technology. But, he continued, the machine not only broadened the possibility for cultural production and made life more convenient, it also caused the spiritual level of people to be transformed. One of its principal results was the emergence of the modern girl. The speed symbolized by technology rapidly replaced the learning and experience of people even at the spiritual level. “Elderly people today are not limited to the knowledge and experience in proportion to the length of the time they have lived. It is natural to not respect a person just because they were born first. Looking at the newspapers and magazines, listening to the discussions in the streets, it is no longer an age that generally respects the aged today. They have become the targets of ridicule, antipathy, and pity. The youth are emancipated from the authority of the aged and we can discover here the social basis of the modern girl.”⁴⁵

While there was probably more anticipation than reality in this observation, more desire than actuality, Hirabayashi was, I believe, more right than wrong when he concluded that the “emergence of the modern girl marked the special characteristic of women in an age of declining authority.”⁴⁶ What is important about these observations is the recognition that the figure of the modern girl was not simply an empty symbol, an imaginary construction of the movies and popular discourse, but was the signification of more deeply rooted social and material processes that were threatening to alter the social structure of Japanese society and throw into question the status of traditional forms of morality and claims of authority. Embedded in the seductive imaging of the modern girl was the formation of a new women’s consciousness that the prevailing system of authority had not anticipated and which cultural ideology would seek to efface, displace, and even repress as the calamitous sign of social contradiction and uneven development.

After the earthquake, material changes simply affirmed the image and power of this figure. While film culture was favored as the route to grasping the new everyday life in its textured materiality, others saw how it could be understood concretely and holistically in newspapers and mass circulation magazines and in new forms of popular music imported from the United States. Publications like *Modan Nippon* (Modern Japan), in its inaugural edition (10/30), celebrated a litany of modern and new customs and images of things people would soon be seeing, such as “flush toilets,” “pavements,” “Western clothes,” “chairs,” “apartments,” and “business suits.” Moreover, life, it was announced, would be more “sporty” and “speedy,” “there would be more respect for women and a downgrading of men,” and people would be hearing more “jazz,” seeing more “women’s legs” and “breasts.” Another edition, along with the Kodansha popular magazine *Kingu* (King), praised the “Yankee spirit”

and welcomed it and “American daily life” to Japan. Other publications reported on a culture of glimmering neon lights and the steady march of people from dance halls to jazz joints and cafes, crowds of people drinking hard in bars and scurrying off in one-yen taxi cabs on “broadened thoroughfares” constructed after the earthquake of 1923. Social discourse in magazines like *Shufu no tomo* described the new “culture houses” of salarymen, the appearance of nuclear families living in the cities, their household economies and outdoor recreation such as excursions to parks and miniature golf links and leisure time spent with the family, milling through department stores stocked with affordable commodities like cameras, radios, and irons.

The women’s magazine *Fujin kōron* in the 1930s ran transcripts of discussions in which Japan’s leading male and female critics assessed the status of the new cultural living. One particular discussion concentrated on the utility of the bed and the bedroom in contrast to the tatami room and the futon. At about the same time, the poet Hagiwara Sakutarō confessed he preferred the comforts of a Western-style bed, even though he announced his own desire to “return to Japan” in a poem that condensed all of the anxieties a whole generation expressed concerning the price paid for modernization and Westernization. The decade of the 1920s also saw a veritable explosion of a kid’s culture consisting of new products targeting children of the middle class: phonograph records, toys like miniature trains and telescopes, and new candies such as Meiji and Morinaga. The use of the term “mama” apparently began sometime in 1929.⁴⁷ Children even had their own magazine, which imitated the more popular women’s journals like *Shufu no tomo* and *Josei* and aimed to distribute useful information concerning health and education. Although much of the glitter of this material culture was aimed at the middle classes, with the working class still embedded in more received forms of everyday life, it did trickle down and permeate the various social strata of the cities, if not the more remote villages of the countryside.

But because the discourse on everyday life was concerned with surface descriptions, literally advertising the establishment of a new reality, tracking it and figuring it, it also began to reveal doubts about the consequences of this conquest of commodity culture and complain of the effects of the unevenness and social contradictions people were living. By the time the army was forcibly occupying Manchuria and the first effects of the world depression were reaching Japan, the social critic Aono Suekichi, as we shall see, was reporting that salarymen in the early 1930s were beginning to show signs of “psychological unhappiness” because they could not satisfy their desire for consumption and fulfill their aspirations as a social class. Magazines like *King* tried to promote upbeat messages that sanitized “street life” in advertisements that extolled beauty and dis-

cussions advising ways to maintain healthy households and living within one's means. Virtually every issue promised new knowledge and the virtues of what Kodansha named "commonsense science" (which Tosaka Jun would see as the ideology of the status quo) that reached a mass readership through direct mailing. One of the paradoxes of the period is how mass circulation magazines dispersed an ideology of the recovered family and established social relationships yet continued to introduce new possibilities for consumption capable of eroding the bonds of social solidarity. The newspapers went even further with both advertisements targeting consumers and lurid tales of scandals that invariably kept the image of new kinds of (sexual) relationships before the reading public.

What enthusiasm for the modern conceded was the recognition that so many of the changes were restricted to urban areas, and only their rumor reached the countryside. This image of the metropolitan city as universal was constantly affirmed by writers like Kikuchi Kan who celebrated the birth of a new human. "Modern thought that has come to Japan is beginning today to give birth to the modern masses," he wrote enthusiastically and optimistically in *Bungei shunjū* (February 1927).⁴⁸ It is important to acknowledge that his optimism failed to take into account, four years later, the army's imperial seizure of Manchuria and its subsequent closing down of journals like *Kindai shisō* (Modern thought). In fact, writers like Kikuchi rarely fastened their attention on Japan as a whole and merely assumed that Tokyo, the part, stood in for the whole, repressing the very unevenness that the city/countryside division dramatized and, by extension, that existed between the metropole and the colony. While his attention was entirely riveted to street life and the changes in life style and attitudes found in the cities, his silence obscured the existence of the other half of Japan, the place of the villages where the majority of the population still lived and the small businessman—the "reliable" backbone of the middle classes, who remained ambivalently outside of the benefits of new forms of consumption. Modernism, celebrating the birth of new human, a "modernism without pretension," as Kikuchi put it, effectively repressed the vast unevenness signified by cities like Tokyo, just as effectively as the appeals to culture and community, as we shall see, worked to efface the divisions introduced by modern life by freezing both in eternity. The monthly *Ie no hikari* (Light of the household), distributed widely throughout the countryside, rarely advertised new products or offered articles describing the superiority of Western clothing and foods. Instead, it provided information on how to get along with what people had and regularly offered useful tips on such things as the preparation of "joyful egg dishes for guests" and "how to make *shōyu* for household use" rather than buying it. Avoiding, at all times, the glamorous side of women's culture, it ran ads for "immediate employment" in jobs like "maids,"

“store clerks,” “bus conductors,” “inn servants,” and “factory” (small rural shops). Yamakawa Hitoshi in 1934 surveyed living conditions in the North (admittedly already affected by the depression) and reported that most households did not even possess one futon to sleep on, often using piles of trash for bedding, while another survey of Osaka Prefecture in the same year showed that there was an average of no more than 1.8 lamps for lighting per household and that the light bulbs used had the power of sixteen candles. The critic Ikuta Aoyama dismissed modern men and women (Kikuchi’s new humans) as a “parade of goblins that have no substance” and called for a termination of all further discussion of “Tokyo tastes and gemeutlich.”⁴⁹ The small towns and villages of the countryside were left behind the capitalization of the cities, even as they were expected to sustain the engines of capitalism’s desiring machine.

This sense of alienation, recorded brilliantly by Yanagita Kunio and confirmed by the historian Hani Gorō in his denunciation of “community studies,” opened the way for the development of communitarianism, rural cooperation, and the advocacy of self-reliance. In an article in *Ie no hikari* in February 1931, for example, a writer proposed that agriculture, fishing, and forestry were the bases of a country’s industry and the “kernel of the economy.” If these basic economic activities were allowed to collapse, sacrificed to industrialization and consumption, the country itself would collapse. “The life and death of one industry manages the life and death of all others.” To avoid this unhappy fate, the writer recommended a moratorium on consuming luxury items and renewed moral discipline capable of overcoming “the lewdness and dissipation of town and country.” As a result of “frivolous Western influence, young men and women put on airs and rampantly swagger ‘newness.’” What he called for was a return to the spiritual foundations of society and a rearticulation of the “principles of the mutual splendor of coexistence (*kyōzon dōei*):” maintaining harmonious relations with neighbors and promoting cooperation within communities and between villages.⁵⁰ To this end, the writer recommended (1) the establishment of a regime of frugality; (2) greater efforts to increase capital accumulation in the countryside; (3) encouraging increased efficiency in agricultural production; and (4) cutting down production costs and a cautious expansion of the market as the only solution to rural relief. It is important to suggest, at this point, that the idea of village cooperation was envisioned as an alternative to the consumption culture identified with the cities. The villages were seen, in time, as a refuge against the profligacy of the cities, and the cities were envisaged as the cause of rural impoverishment and grief. Ikuta Aoyama saw no reason for the coexistence of the old and new, since the latter was superficial while the former was not. Kagawa and Andō, as already suggested, quantified the mass recruitment of young women conscripted to staff the vast

pleasure quarters of the cities. A new religion, Hitonomichi Kyōdan, appeared in the cities to minister to those Aono had identified as “psychologically unhappy.” Enlisting its members widely from among city classes, the new religion was organized to offer counseling to unhappy men and women and to emphasize the importance of “spousal harmony” as the work of the gods. Although it provided the prospect of stoicism of the spirit, less sex at home, it also promoted the possibility of realizing the good life in the customs and commodities of modern life because the new life-styles required money and expenditure. The magazine *Shufu no tomo* in 1931 addressed the issue of disharmony prompted by a dissatisfactory sex life among couples and how its continuation could be “injurious to nature.” The magazine advised greater cooperation between couples, which meant that women should suppress their needs in the interest of saving the family. These frank discussions on modern sexuality conveyed a mixed or contradictory message that acknowledged a relationship between women’s new liberated status and an awareness of their own sexual needs at the same time that they counseled them to cooperate in the interest of preserving the family and affirming a patriarchal order that cared more for men’s needs. The appearance of a number of journals devoted to exploring modern sexuality may well have reflected simply the success of the mass media in titillating a readership already hardened to the discipline of daily scandals, but it also revealed, again, the existence of the changing circumstances women were experiencing and the identification of new needs that required serious attention.⁵¹

What this surface discussion on the everyday life of new commodities, custom, and social relationships revealed, albeit inadvertently, was the historical role of unequal development in the subsequent production of a modernist discourse that would seek to repress and efface its signs. It raised the spectacle of disunity, division, and difference, which it did not know how to resolve; it conveyed this message of unevenness through juxtaposition and propinquity. Its image of an implied disunity collided with the consensual conviction upheld by the state that society must be made to show that no real divisions exist, that life corresponds perfectly to the very categories employed to provide the social unit with its representation of unity. This unit, as the discourse on everydayness was showing, was threatened by the separation of activities of social agents and the changeability of social relations; it could be restored only if the divisions that had actually constituted society—capital and labor—are negated, concealed, or resolved in the future.⁵² What is important, for my purposes, is how this discussion on modern life ultimately produced a secondary discourse on the social, culminating in the wartime conference on overcoming modernity, devoted to displacing the doubts provoked by the spectacle of unevenness that challenged the metropolitan interpretation of its

own experience as universal. Native ethnologists like Yanagita Kunio early recognized the presence of unequal development in the policy to sacrifice the countryside for the city, while the sociologist Takada Yasuma, a translator of Simmel and a proponent of interactionist social theory, declared his allegiance to *gemeinschaft*, as he put it, and a reaffirmation of the principles of harmony and consensus as the essential forms of social relationships in Japan. By the early 1930s, there were attempts to rein in the culture of consumption and eliminate its excesses in calls for “regulating custom.” Shigeta Tadamasu wrote an influential book called *Fūzoku keisatsu no riron to jissai* (The theory and reality of policing custom, 1934) in which he sought to explain the reasons for policing contemporary custom. Policing, he claimed, was necessary to limit and even prohibit acts and conduct injurious to society in order to preserve the social good.⁵³ Moreover, systems devoted to regulating public places like dance halls were inaugurated in the mid-1920s to prevent admittance of geisha and students who were minors. Ordinances were promulgated to prevent children from going to the cinema because, as Gonda Yasunosuke observed, their heads were emptied out. In the 1930s films considered “harmful to the customs of contemporary society” were increasingly censored, and showing them incurred risks.⁵⁴ This was especially true of Western imports, which invariably featured scenes portraying the kiss and associated emotions that ended up on the floor of the cutting room. Women’s fashions, especially Western apparel, and popular songs were also subjected to regulations in the interest of preserving public morality.

In contrast to the discussions on everyday life, preoccupied with the surface and the present—hence marking its own historicity—the discourse on the social was concerned with depth, searching for fixed essences beneath the visible skin of contemporary life. It fastened on those traces that would reveal an existence prior to capitalism and modernity. Seeking to repress signs of its own historicity, this discourse pursued the task of constructing a vast synchronic drama that, because it was posited upon forgetting the instituting moment, could not allow into it any diachronic reflection or reference. When Marxists and progressives turned to critique, they projected an image of culture which, based on the existence of an everydayness of the present, would complete modernity in the future. Yet for both the left and the right, the task was still to overcome the division, disunity, and fragmentation that contemporary society was experiencing. This folding back and retracing ultimately made the discourse on the social ideological, inasmuch as its purpose was to remove, conceal divisions, naturalize historical relationships, and eternalize them by attributing to them coherence based on an essence outside of time. Instead of attending to the place of production, it resorted to the production of place. The temporal process was incorporated into space. This

discursive activity, split off from one derived from social practice, was less a simulation of the real, as Marx once believed, than a dissimulation of it. It was for this reason that thinkers and writers sought to install in the present a moment of recall or recovered experience, a memory *of* rather than *from* a time before time (as the ethnologist Orikuchi Shinobu might have put it), whether it was an aesthetic principle, a religious practice, a communitarian ideal, or a cultural imaginary.

In the writings of Yanagita Kunio, we have the example of how the recognition of cultural unevenness, what he called *ainoko bunmei* (mixed civilization), was not a temporary stage in an evolutionary narrative but a permanently entrenched condition that could be found throughout East Asia. His program endeavored, with others trying to account for the speed of modernization, to supply the figure of a palimpsestic imaginary where the earlier and essential layers of national life, in the form of custom, practice, and beliefs, were still able to filter through the modern overlays and provide a map for the present. The philosopher Watsuji Tetsurō, a former student of Martin Heidegger, called this stratigraphic layering *ju-sōsei* and envisioned history as a spatial stockpiling of strategic epochs in the itinerary of the spirit, each laying on top of each other yet somehow transparent. Yanagita appealed to the trope of a nonlinear history of custom by employing the vivid imagery of a stalactitic formation that grows unobserved into the shape of a large icicle. Others, like Kuki Shūzō, looked to an essential experience such as *iki* that had reached its maturation in the late eighteenth century and was therefore prior to capitalism and free from Western metaphysics yet fully capable of anchoring the Japanese of the present, even though it called attention to a way of life of a particular past era. On a closer look, his hermeneutic meditation on the form of late Edo culture, as encapsulated in the elusive term *iki*, was more an imagined recalling of something that never quite existed, an originary experience that came from the future rather than the past that stood-in for the genius of the race. In this regard, Miki Kiyoshi's powerful conception of a "foundational experience," a rereading of both Marx and Nishida Kitarō, provided a whole generation with the necessary conceptual apparatus to undertake the arduous task of trying to think their way to overcoming the modern. The native ethnologist Orikuchi saw in folkloric traces—what Yanagita had identified as living "vestiges," the figure of a primordial everyday life that would reveal another place of difference outside of history and remind contemporaries of its production of enduring values such as "constancy," "eternity," and "absoluteness." But all of these, and more, were simply constructions that came into existence precisely and suddenly at the moment when older conceptions of life were beginning to disappear. Hence, thought and literature turned increasingly to locating a metaphorical space whose discovery would fulfill ageless

models outside of society itself. This move entailed finding a refuge from what many believed to be an inauthentic social life (based on inauthentic knowledge) in which the process of capitalist modernization was integrating people into larger impersonal units of organization and enforcing greater dependence on them. What this discourse on the social disclosed was an immense struggle to catch hold of an everydayness—modern life—that always escapes because it lacks a true subject yet manages, at the same time, to routinize every aspect of social life. It aimed, therefore, to redefine daily life itself enduringly as something that was neither always escaping nor rooted in routine, to give it a stable and fixed form and meaning in order to overcome an indeterminate public space—the streets—where culture was being lived and alienations, fetishisms, and reifications were producing their effects.⁵⁵

By rejecting an outer and objective domain already in process of becoming reified, discourse began to identify the place of creativity that produced enduring meaning and cultural values capable of fixing stable social relationships such as the family, village, and communal cooperative. In this transaction, the empirical was often abandoned, the performative present dismissed, to make place for an essentialized entity to occupy. As an interpretive mode aimed at unearthing the ground of authenticity, the new cultural discourse favored a hermeneutics that promised to probe beneath the surface and thereby locate a fixed “existence,” a timeless everydayness, as imagined by native ethnologists, a paradigmatic moment revealing the genius of the race in a historical time/style, an eternal aesthetics or poetics now made visible by the glaring contrast posed by Western culture (Tanizaki Junichirō, Kobayashi Hideo), a spatially privileged climate and history free from change, authorizing an entirely different ethic of social relationships unaccountable to time (Watsuji Tetsurō), in the scene of speaking (Tokieda Motoki), the countryside (Yanagita), or in the auratic experience of the “other place” (Orikuchi). Although Marxists and progressive thinkers rejected this method, they nonetheless imagined the possibility of realizing a more evenly developed modern society by starting with the present and its performative dimension, through the exercise of critique, science, and rationality. As late as 1941, the philosopher Miki Kiyoshi, who traveled an intellectual route from Marxism to phenomenology, sought to resolve the apparent fragmentations and divisions marking modernity by uniting culture and life (*seikatsu*). Miki appealed to an older Asian tradition that had always insisted upon the integration of culture into everyday life. “The philosophy of everyday culture,” he wrote, “starts from the basic idea that culture and daily life are unified, that daily life is culture.” If pursued from below culture is reached, but if one begins with culture one reaches daily life. What Miki hoped to unify was a conception of “cultural life” (*bunka seikatsu*) that had, until re-

cently, characterized modern everydayness in the interwar period with one derived from the actual experience of the social lifeworld of the people, yoking essence to a form of existence, poetics, and history, without ever proposing a specific agenda. Yet we must read his proposal as a sign of the very fragmentation of everyday life and culture that the discourse on the social was seeking to resolve. Where he departed from so many of his contemporaries was in his belief that “living culture” (*seikatsu bunka*) was movement, making, transforming, not fixed, static, “things as they are,” or simple negativity toward the given. In the end, this effort to negate or conceal the social divisions that instituted society in modern Japan, the immense task of repressing the vast unevenness that had gripped both political economy and culture, gave way to a frenzied attempt to “overcome the modern.” If, as we shall see, the discourse on the social and the conference on overcoming sought to eternalize forces in a fixed “spirit,” “essence,” and “existence,” it could only do so by dissolving the modern and appealing to myth and national poetics and aestheticism. But because modernity itself constituted a constant overcoming, Japanese found themselves facing the impossible task of temporally overcoming what was already an overcoming. This dilemma could only remind them of the inevitable succession of historical phenomena, the excess of historical consciousness, and a common destiny that they would always remain overcome by modernity.