

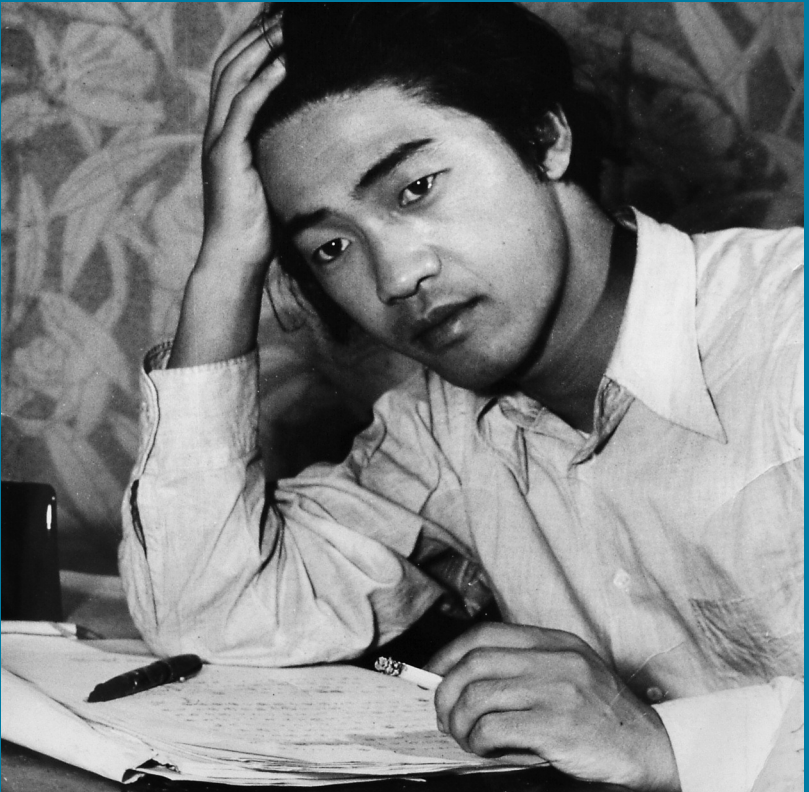
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Thomas Schnellbächer

# Abe Kōbō, Literary Strategist

The Evolution of his Agenda  
and Rhetoric in the Context of  
Postwar Japanese Avant-garde and  
Communist Artists Movements



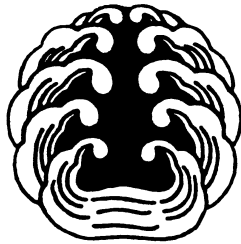
THOMAS SCHNELLBÄCHER  
ABE KŌBŌ, LITERARY STRATEGIST

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THOMAS SCHNELLBÄCHER

**ABE KŌBŌ,  
LITERARY STRATEGIST**

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Communist Artists' Movements



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**Die Vignette** aus dem klassischen japanischen Repertoire der Heraldik nach Naturerscheinungen stellt *kawari tsui-nami*, einander entgegenschlagende Wellen, dar und soll hier eines der Hauptthemen der Reihe, die Begegnung der Kulturen, symbolisieren.

**The cover photograph** shows Abe Kōbō in 1951, working on the short story collection *Kabe* (Walls), with which he was to have his breakthrough as a professional writer later that year. Abe wore glasses ever since his school days, and there are not many photographs showing the author without a pair of more or less thick-rimmed spectacles. At this early stage in his career, however, he was too poor to replace them, if they were lost or broken. It would be rash to assume that this photograph shows the author's true face. It does however show him without his most familiar mask.

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*My purpose was to plot a chart to survey the tactics and strategies of the warriors of the pen. Or rather I wanted to provide the squared paper on which to plot a chart.*

*“Charts for charts”, 1954.*

*[...] Like the legs of a snake, ‘things’ flee infinitely. The discovery of things is an endless pursuit.*

*“First the dissecting knife”, 1955/1957.*



## BACKGROUND AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This book is a slightly amended version of my doctoral dissertation presented at Berlin Free University (Freie Universität Berlin), and defended in October 2001. The dissertation project began in 1993 with my move to Berlin, into the atmosphere of new beginning that pervaded the city following its reunification. The period of composition and since has been marked by increased sobriety in my attitude to historic new beginnings, yet there is no denying the enduring fascination of such situations even when viewed with a critical gaze. In the course of this project, I received help from numerous individual people and institutions, without which it would have been a hopeless undertaking. Those named here are only the longest and/or most intensely involved.

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Abe Kōbō House/Abe Kōbō Archive.

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Mr. Satō Masafumi, Ms. Satō Eiko  
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## INTRODUCTION: A LITERARY CAREER IN THE CONTEXT OF THE POSTWAR

Abe Kōbō (1924–1993) is often characterized as a particularly universal Japanese author, international and beyond political dichotomies. While there is certainly no denying that Abe developed a literary technique that is accessible in a wide variety of cultural contexts, there is also a need to view his work in the context of his political commitment. Abe spent his formative years as a member of the Japan Communist Party (JCP) until he was expelled from the party along with more than twenty other writers at the beginning of 1962. This was also the year in which Abe published *The woman in the dunes* (*Suna no onna*), which was to win him a reputation as a major writer nationally, and also internationally after the film version (directed by Teshigawara Hiroshi) won the Special Prize of the Jury at the Cannes Film Festival in 1964. Whatever political views Abe espoused after 1962, it makes sense to ask what was the significance of his political creed to his aesthetics before that date. This contradicts the fact that effectively, Abe has seldom been discussed as a Communist writer, other than with regard to those 1950s works where Communist themes or motifs are impossible to ignore. It is as if Abe Kōbō the Communist and Abe Kōbō the author of world literature were not the same person.

In fact, Abe himself repeatedly addressed the problem of consistency in his epilogues, for example that to his second essay collection, *The philosophy of the desert* (*Sabaku no shisō*, 1965; c. f. III. 1.2). Having called the collection “so to speak the revelation of the tricks of my trade as a writer”, he makes a point of asserting the homogeneity of the body of texts in the collection, written in the course of the two decades since the start of his career. Conceding that his work as a whole must appear heterogeneous at first glance, he continues, using the desert metaphor of the book title:

I think that such erratic progress was hard to avoid for a traveller in the desert. As evidence of this, each text has compass needles hidden somewhere between the lines, like a secret image, and if one looks carefully, one’s attention is drawn to the fact that they are always pointing to somewhere particular. And somewhere near this point, you will always stumble on a story or play of mine that is already there. [AKZb19, 413.]



The need to generate continuity, while simultaneously arguing the inevitability of discontinuity and revolutionary change, is characteristic of Abe, as it is of many writers who began their careers in the period of rapid social and cultural change after 1945, often referred to simply as “the postwar” (*senjo*). The consequences arising from defining a current age by the ending of what preceded it, will be an important aspect of this study.

In the epilogue to his first essay collection, *With the heart of a beast and a hand like a calculating machine* (*Mōjū no kokoro ni keisanki no te o*, 1957), in defending his body of essays against possible charges of inconsistency, Abe had named a rapid succession of three phases – existentialism, surrealism, and communism –, which he said were united by a continued commitment in artistic movements.<sup>1</sup> When he wrote the later of the two epilogues eight years after the first, Abe had been expelled from the Communist Party. Moreover, since he had effectively ended his active participation in politically committed arts and literature organizations at the same time, he is now looking back on yet another completed phase. But now, neither the past phases nor the present one are named. Of the three phases named, communism is the longest, and overlaps with at least that of the avant-garde (from ca. 1948<sup>2</sup>). After his expulsion, Abe published far fewer programmatic essays defining the basic nature and current tasks of literature, another argument in favour of the view that his basic literary convictions evolved while he was a Communist. This cannot be proved conclusively without examining the whole of a very varied career, something that a Ph. D. dissertation cannot hope to undertake. It is possible, however, to lay some foundations by looking in detail at just what evolved during Abe’s Communist period.

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<sup>1</sup> AKZb7, 476; c. f. Section III. 1.1. In a 1956 dialogue with the critic Hariu Ichirō, Abe describes more elaborately how he had been an existentialist during wartime, but that the collapse of the social order in postwar Manchuria had demonstrated to him how “self-negating” was the existentialist principle that existence precedes essence (i. e. that human nature is essentially its potential to be something). Later, he continues, it was surrealism that had converted him to materialism (c. f. Abe/Hariu 1956, 147–148).

<sup>2</sup> Abe began attending the meetings of the Night Society (II. 1.3), one of whose central themes was the avant-garde, in 1948, and his story “Dendrokakaria” (*Dendorokakariya*), which made use of avant-garde aesthetics, was published in August 1948.

Little systematic research has been done on the connection between the movement activity and the development of Abe's literary values. Extended studies of this author have been conducted under a variety of different aspects, most of them dealing with literary or philosophical traditions or influences<sup>3</sup>, or describing themes and motifs in typological terms<sup>4</sup>. Such purely typological or narrative approaches help contextualize an author. They cannot, however, take into account the complex relationship between (in this case) Abe's creative output and his socio-political commitment. This study aims at reconstructing the intentionality of Abe's texts (i.e. the programme or agenda implicit in them, as it might have been understood by a well-informed contemporary), but it does not claim to distil his essence of an author, simply to define his place in a discursive context.

#### 1 CONTINUITY, DISCONTINUITY AND THE INTENTION OF TEXTS

Abe Kōbō can be seen as a typical case of a Japanese artist who viewed his communist commitment and creative output as two aspects of a whole and placed his art in the context of a political vision that he identified with the Communist Party and the communist movement. His formative years as a professional writer were spent as a Communist activist, although his best known, and no doubt his best and most important, work was written after his expulsion from the party and his withdrawal from politics. It may well be that this political fall from grace unfettered him as an artist; yet the fact remains that during his formative years, art and politics were inextricably intertwined. It makes sense, therefore, to ask how Abe's aesthetics and his political convictions are related and connected to one another.

My assumption is that the author Abe Kōbō pursued one and the same goal as an artist and as a communist intellectual. The political and the aesthetic aims must therefore be related in some way, but one is not derived from the other. Further, I will aim to show that the political and the aesthetic aims are related in some way via the cen-

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<sup>3</sup> Book-length examples of this are Okaniwa 1980 or Arimura 1994.

<sup>4</sup> E. g. Takano 1971, Currie 1973, Yasaka 1979.

tral values associated with the postwar era, in which he had his debut.

My impression is that a major factor preventing the rather obvious question of the relationship of Abe's political and aesthetic programme from being investigated has been the dichotomy of values dictated by the cold war, a dichotomy that came into being just as Abe was starting to publish in the late 1940s. The ending of the cold war with the break-up of the Soviet Union has made this easier in some ways. It must also be said, however, that on the one hand opinions on communism remain as divided as before, and on the other hand, there is a long tradition of criticism within the communist movement and of studies using related Marxist premises. What has emerged since the early 1990s, however, are a number of studies of the beginnings of the period involved, specifically with reference to the Japanese postwar.

Essays and essay volumes dealing with this theme are treated below in introducing the material on which each chapter is based, but there is also a monographic study of theoretical relevance. This is J. Victor Koschmann's *Revolution and subjectivity in postwar Japan* (1996), which deals with the problems associated with the debate on subjectivity (*shutaisei ronsō*), conducted between two major factions in leftwing literature soon after the end of the war (c. f. I. 2). The issue that Koschmann sees at the centre of these debates, which were concerned to define basic norms of socially committed literature in the postwar era, is that of the relationship of individual and group subjectivity. This is a problem pertinent not only to defining the degree and nature of autonomy that the individual has within a politically defined movement, but also to the function of creativity in such movements, and the relationship of generally bourgeois intellectuals to the common people. In describing the relationship of the freedom of a subject to the factors determining it, Koschmann introduces the term "supplement", denoting "something extra added on to what 'should' be self-sufficient".<sup>5</sup> The problem for Marxist/communist

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<sup>5</sup> Koschmann 1996, p. 24. The source given for the political definition of the term is: Ernesto Laclau/Chantal Mouffe: *Hegemony and socialist strategy*, London 1985. However, the source for the quotation is given as Jacques Derrida: *Of grammarology*, Baltimore 1974, p. 144.

proletarianism is that the proletariat is supposed to be objectively the agent of the revolution, but in the practice of communist politics since the time of Lenin, this collective subject has continually been tutored so that it might fulfil what was defined as its historical destiny. This act of ensuring that the inevitable takes place, as well as the institutions and individuals engaged in carrying it out, constitute a supplement.

Koschmann is a proponent of the idea of social revolution<sup>6</sup>, and as such is not a disinterested theoretician. I do not propose to take up a position in this contradictory concept, but Koschmann's bias is useful for my study in a number of ways. The idea of subjectivity in the debates in question is closely related to questions of agenda that are at the centre of this study. The way in which individual, party and class subjectivity is defined has a direct bearing on how groups and movements define themselves, and how their participants think that they should be organized. How an author defines class consciousness underlies both his or her cognitive possibilities in perceiving social realities and issues, and the modes of communication with the proletariat or the masses through the arts. How a party or other organization defines subjectivity will help determine the degree of ideological discipline imposed on the individual members, and the nature and degree of hegemony claimed by the party. Finally, since this was a generational issue, it will help to define Abe's status as a writer slightly younger again than those involved in these paradigmatic debates. Effectively, Koschmann's programme is revealing because he has it in common with Abe Kōbō and his fellow-activists.

Besides the close-up view of one brief segment of Japanese critical history, it will be necessary to refer to a broader perspective in aesthetic history, and to a theory of text. For this purpose, I have used works by two German commentators, who both share with the Japanese protagonists of the present study the same canon of Marxist categories and problems, and have developed it to suggest ways in which artistic autonomy could be given a place in a socially committed artistic practice. One is Peter Bürger's *Theory of the avant-garde*

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<sup>6</sup> C. f. his closing sentence: "It is not that the democratic revolution [...] has failed, but rather that [...] it remains an 'incomplete project'." (Op. cit., p. 248.)

(Theorie der Avantgarde, 1974<sup>7</sup>), which deals with the significance of the avant-garde for artistic production and reception, the other Jürgen Link's *Elementary literature and generative discourse analysis* (Elementare Literatur und generative Diskursanalyse, 1983), which provides a model for text analysis that combines Marxist categories with elements of semiotics and discourse analysis.

At the centre of Bürger's study, which deals with the consequences of the "historical avant-garde movements" (*historische Avantgardebewegungen*) early surrealism and Dadaism for institutionalized art in bourgeois society, is the concept of the "non-organic work of art" (*nicht-organisches Kunstwerk*) as a fragmentary and open entity, a structural principle to which my characterization of agenda as a plural term also corresponds (c. f. Bürger p. 76–77 and 92–98). If a text or body of texts is principally open, then the oppositions existing between values in this entity also have a certain degree of contingency and possibly arbitrariness. Bürger gives an interpretation of how the relative contingency (*Zufall/hazard*) of the "non-organic" work of art permits social commitment by artists, without giving up artistic autonomy, an invention of the *l'art pour l'art* movement of the end of the nineteenth century. According to Bürger, such non-organic art will be necessary as long as there is a bourgeois society (c. f. p. 26–35 and 49–63). At the same time, he rejects the surrealists' cult of contingency as an idealization of something that they had introduced in order to escape being determined by ideology (c. f. p. 87–92).

Standing in the tradition of the critical theory of the Frankfurt School, he is interested in the avant-garde as a movement that laid the foundations for art to practise immanent (self-)critique (p. 27) of the ideology of its own contemporary society. These movements, which failed in their aim of "leading art back into the practice of life" (*Rückführung der Kunst in die Lebenspraxis*, p. 29), explains Bürger, revealed the causal connection between the institutionalized autonomy of art, and its "lack of consequences" (*Folgenlosigkeit*, p. 29). This is explained by the fact that although the avant-garde reacted against the radical claim to autonomy of the "aestheticist" *l'art pour l'art* movement, they inherited the "full articulation" (*volle Ausdifferen-*

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<sup>7</sup> An English version was published in 1984 (Manchester Univ. Press); however, references in this study are to the German original.

zierung) of the social phenomenon art embodied by the latter, providing the conditions postulated by the Marxian theorem that such articulation is the precondition for the generalization of a descriptive category (p. 21–22)<sup>8</sup>. Thus, while negating autonomy and postulating the sublation (*Aufhebung*, p. 67) of art and life in a new kind of practice, the avant-gardists benefited from the fact that the aestheticians had developed a whole catalogue of “artistic techniques” (*Kunstmittel* p. 22–23), from which they were now able rationally to choose.

Bürger appears to attribute the failure of the classical avant-garde to a certain vulnerability to absorption in practice by capitalist production (e.g. the mass production techniques employed by Andy Warhol), or in ideological terms by traditional institutionalized forms of production (the idea of creative genius) and reception (consumption) (p. 69–73). He therefore suggests not discarding the idea of autonomy, as demanded by the avant-gardists, preferring to adopt Adorno’s verdict that: “The only works of art that count today are those that are not works of art” (*Philosophy of modern music*, Philosophie der neuen Musik; Bürger, p. 76), paraphrasing the predicate as ‘works of art that are not organic works of art’. Of such a “non-organic” work of art, Bürger writes that it differs from an “organic” one in that the unity of the general and the specific is not postulated as something unmediated (given, and necessary in all its components), but that the unity is always mediated, being generated in extreme cases by the recipient alone (p. 76–77). In other words, no part is essential to the whole, and a closed whole is not essential for the understanding of the parts, which must logically refer for significance to factors outside the work, rather than the totality of the work. The category that Bürger uses to describe the constitution of such a work

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<sup>8</sup> The reference is to Marx’ *A contribution to the critique of political economy* (*Grundrisse der Kritik der politischen Ökonomie* (1859), which deals with the theoretical basis for an immanent criticism. Using the example of the category work, Marx explains that though the French physiocrats of the eighteenth century first explained the connection between work and wealth, it was not until this was developed further in the political economy of Adam Smith, that work and wealth could be seen in terms other than agricultural, because the industrial revolution was further advanced in the United Kingdom, and Smith was familiar with a greater variety of work processes. (Summarized by Bürger, p. 21–22).

is “montage” (French and German spelling identical: the term is modelled on cubist painting rather than film, where the parts tend not to be recognizable as a collection of heterogeneous units). This in turn he defines as a specific case of “allegory” in the sense used by Walter Benjamin in *The origin of German tragic drama* (*Der Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiels*, 1928), with its connotations of fragmentary artefact and melancholy. (P. 98–116 and 114, note 22.)

In sum, this amounts to the position that though the historical avant-garde movements failed in their aim of establishing a totality that overcame the discontinuity between art and social practice (because the practice of bourgeois society absorbed it), they nevertheless overcame the absolute discontinuity posited by aestheticism and provided the conditions for a new kind of autonomy based on the relative discontinuity of the “non-organic” work of art. Among the characteristics he gives for the non-organic work of art, is that it negates synthesis, within the work (p. 106). This means, amongst other things, that the act of reading is given a central function in constituting the whole, the parts being related in paradigmatic rather than syntagmatic ways within the text, and the reader having to make the connection. For works of fiction, for example, this means that not the events narrated in their own right are at the centre of attention, but the structuring principle underlying them (p. 107). This is linked also to Bürger’s position outlined in his introduction, that the place of content is taken, not by the effect intended by the author, but by the “intention of the work” (*Werkintention*), which he defines as “vanishing point of the effects [*Wirkungsmittel*] discernible in the work” (p. 12).

In order to do this for Abe Kōbō, therefore, it will be necessary to reconstruct the discursive context within which he was writing before being able to constitute the paradigms necessary for an interpretation. It is such paradigms, of course, that permit both continuities (similarities) with the age and discontinuities (differences) to be determined. These paradigms must be seen as acting in both directions, providing the conditions both for production and reception of a text.

Bürger’s idea of autonomy depends heavily on the concept of institutionalized art. While it is well-nigh impossible to determine how ‘autonomous’ a work is in reality, it is certainly possible to point out

that there is an immaterial institution effective in capitalist society, a discourse forbidding the instrumentalization of art. Similarly, it is possible to be objective about the extent to which a discourse or author espouses autonomy, and about how this concept is conceived, and it is possible to compare this with a theoretical definition. Yet, there is a more general difficulty in using this theory, which despite the fact that it deals with historical realities, is very abstract and cannot be applied directly. Nevertheless, the central concept provides useful guidelines for this study. Primarily, this is the idea of the non-organic work of art and the hypothesis linked to it that the structuring principle of montage permits autonomy through immanent criticism. Associated with this is the idea of the intention of the text based on the discursive context, and the assertion that the reader is responsible for the meaning, rather than the author. Of course, a study of this kind needs to objectivize these readings by constructing paradigms and structured models by which texts can be compared with other texts. This what I propose to do with Abe Kōbō's essays, and this is the purpose of the second theoretical work mentioned.

Link deals more concretely with structures of texts, and how their readers generate the meaning (hence the generative approach addressed in his title). He also deals with problems of autonomy and institutionalized art, but in a way that is focused on the constitution of texts and how they can be read within the norms given by social institutions. He uses the concept of the "inter-discourse" (*Interdiskurs*), which draws on Julia Kristeva's idea of intertextuality and combines it with the Marxist theorem distinguishing artistic practice as secondary production from material production proper. According to Link, ideology (which does not bear the pejorative connotations that the term has in classical Marxism) is "the imaginary totalization of practices" through a specific cultural discourse (p. 17). While such an ideological discourse associates certain values with certain shared symbols, inter-discourse consists of the sum of discursive elements common to more than one discourse, irrespective of the values associated with them in specific discourses. Literature is seen as the special case of an institutionalized discourse based on such inter-discursive elements (p. 69, note 2). For the transferable potential of inter-discursive signs, Link makes use of a property of tropes, particularly metaphors, namely their basic ambivalence. For example, there is a



certain tradition that images of floods are used to stand for social upheaval, but neither does this necessarily define such upheaval as positive or negative, nor is this the only way to read the sign. Implicit in this is also the potential for ambivalence between metaphor and metonym, especially in art that is based on mimetic principles.

Hence, it is the imaginary totalization characteristic of elaborated fictions that safeguards the autonomy of art. Institutionalized literature is contrasted with elementary literature: the “semi-finished products” of which institutionalized literature is composed, such as symbols or myths, and which Link characterizes as catachrestic and thus revealing hidden contingencies, in the manner of dreams, p. 29). Institutionalized literature is seen as constituting a coherent reality by virtue of its being divorced from social practice, thus enabling it to reflect society without being determined by pragmatic anchoring to a particular discourse (p. 30).

This is amongst other things a rhetorical approach to text analysis, which, once again, is the corollary of the fact that the reader generates the meaning based on the intention implicit in the text. Link’s approach provides a clue to how this intention can be analysed with recourse to tropes. The main potential of the theory for this study is in providing a model for how tropes are derived from social practice, how they become institutionalized in literature, and how they lend both a self-legitimizing and a critical potential to literature that enables it, according to Link, to maintain autonomy. The concept of the inter-discourse does not appear useful as an instrument of analysis, but provides an explanation in terms of discourse analysis for the way in which autonomy is legitimised.

There is an important difference to Bürger’s concept of autonomy. The latter had stressed the need for immanent criticism of bourgeois society from within, arguing that the open, non-organic work of art was the appropriate medium for this. In Bürger’s terms, Link appears to be more reliant on the traditional *l’art pour l’art* approach of founding autonomy on artistic homogeneity and discontinuity between art and social practice. From Link’s point of view, Bürger could be seen as advocating autonomy through elementary rather than institutionalized literature. On the other hand, this is simply a difference in emphasis, since both agree that it is the institution of art (or literature) that safeguards autonomy in bourgeois society. The essential difference

could be seen in the fact that Link emphasizes the importance of fiction, while Bürger argues for a weakening of autonomy and the importance of non-fictional elements. Effectively, this makes it possible to use these two approaches to make a scale that can be used to gauge the kind of autonomy aimed at by a particular author, such as Abe Kōbō.

In sum, the range of problems common to the author and his environment, the age as a whole, as well as a number of theoretical approaches, makes it possible to attempt an analysis of Abe Kōbō's literature that takes into account broad social discourses. The focus of the study is on an analysis of the intention and rhetoric of texts by Abe.

Rhetoric, according to a reference work covering a related discipline, has come to mean, since about the middle of the twentieth century, the "semiotics of communication in general" – having originally been the "semiotics of persuasion", thereafter "sinking" to become "semiotics of style" (1600–1800) and even "semiotics of falsification" (1800–1950).<sup>9</sup> Leaving aside the question of how justified the broadly polemical disqualification of the intellectual trends of three and a half centuries is, I believe that the above characterizations of the antique and modern usages of the term provide useful points of orientation for the present study. The modern understanding of rhetoric as an aspect of communication in general makes it possible to use the terms of rhetoric as tools for the analysis of written texts, despite the fact that texts cannot, by their nature, give reliable access to the true authorial intention (the clear articulation of which is a rhetorical prerequisite in the act of composition, but which is not, of course, mentioned in the text itself). On the other hand, the modern understanding also revives that original understanding that rhetoric does not 'only' describe emotional or aesthetic qualities, but acts on the recipient in socially and politically relevant ways. For this reason, rhetoric is the predestined tool for gauging how a text not only articulates and explicates sociopolitical aims, but actually begins to put them into practice, by pre-structuring the act of reading.

But this is not to say that a text is necessarily motivated by a homogenous set of aims. Amongst other things, it is conceivable – and indeed probable – that it contains contradictory moments, and it may even have been composed precisely with the object of articulating

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<sup>9</sup> John McClelland: "Rhetoric", section on History in EDS, p. 815.

unforeseen contradictions. Hence, even texts that contain a considerable element of self-reflection, like lyric poems or essays, have a rhetorical dimension that can be analysed. Hence, it not only makes sense to analyse the rhetoric of homogenous moments of a text, such an analysis can be used to reconstruct the intentionality of parts of the text separately, and define the relationships between them. In addition, there is a difference between the logical argument of the discourse and the more suggestive workings of the rhetoric. It is conceivable that a text can work on readers in ways that contradict either the agenda expressed in it, or those expressed elsewhere by the same author. No author can be in complete control of the actual effect of the text, since it is impossible to account for all the possible readings of it, or for all the empirical readers that it will have.

By reason of their fundamental ambivalence, tropes are important variants in the reading process. Strictly speaking, any reference to extra-textual reality is figurative, since no sign of any kind can be identical with its referent. Thus, the reference to “nuts” and “bolts” in an instruction manual can be said to be metonymic, having a pragmatic relation to the material objects indicated. Metaphors are more fundamentally ambivalent, since a metaphor leaves it to the recipient to make the connection between the image and its pragmatic object(s). For this reason, metaphor can be seen as the central device giving access to the symbolic level of fictional texts, such as prose narrative, drama, or poetry.<sup>10</sup>

Instead of purely fictional texts, however, this study deals with essays for various reasons. The first is that much has been written about Abe’s prose fiction and plays, but not much about his essays, which also display a distinctive style, and moreover constitute an important discursive context for his fictional texts. This connection, interesting though it is, has been excluded here, because the aim of the exercise has been to reconstruct the status of the texts as acts in their time, and it is not possible to do this with reference to the texts of one author alone. Instead of a systematic comparison between essays and works

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<sup>10</sup> The essay genre is not mentioned by Link, but it would have to be positioned in the middle between specialized discourse, elementary literature, and institutionalized literature, partaking of aspects of the stringency of specialized discourse, the autonomy of institutionalized literature, and the open quality of elementary literature.

of fiction, this study cross-references essays and non-fictional narratives dealing with the contexts within which they were published.

The other reason is constitutive for this study, and has to do with the hybrid nature of essays. Given the aim of reconstructing the intentionality of primary texts, essays have the obvious advantage that at least a portion of their intentionality appears in the form of discursive logic, which is generally well hidden in works of fiction. This is not to say that essays necessarily reveal more about the author's true motivation than stories, but true motivation is explicitly not at issue here. Instead, next to declared intentions, the analysis will discuss moments appearing in the same text that are more suggestive, and may or may not have been consciously employed by the author to produce certain effects. This is the use of tropes.

Although essays are more discursive than purely fictional texts, one would expect that the more an essay relies on figurative reference, the more room there will be for ambivalence, interpretation, and contradiction.<sup>11</sup> One could therefore arrange essay types on a scale ranging from predominantly metonymic texts at one end (e. g. essays with strong elements of polemic or treatise), and to metaphorical texts at the other (coming close, for example to the form of the prose poem). As this typological sketch shows, the breadth of possible uses of the essay is considerable, and accordingly the essays discussed range from highly technical discussions of the psychology of authorship to newspaper articles for a broad readership, and from virtual prose poems to polemical attacks. However, the emphasis is on relatively discursive and directly programmatic texts.

In determining what types of trope are used, and how they are combined, I have found Julien Greimas' concept of "isotopy" helpful. This assumes that textual coherence is generated by "a series of redundant semantic categories which make a uniform reading of the story possible".<sup>12</sup> In other words, it is the repetition of certain seman-

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<sup>11</sup> The fictional and/or ambivalent nature of the essay is a standard topic of essay theory. In his "Preface" to the *Encyclopedia of the essay* (EE, p. xix-xxi), Graham Good also summarizes this middle position as being "characterized as provisional and exploratory, rather than systematic and definitive," or again, he comments that: "Just as the essay is considered to be 'not quite' science or philosophy or theory, it is also 'not quite' art."

<sup>12</sup> Greimas: *Du sens*, Paris: Seuil, 1970, p. 188; cited from "Isotopy" in EDS.

tic characteristics shared by signs within the text, that enables a reader to make sense of it. Though formulated in the context of narratology, this can be applied equally to poems and historical narratives. I would like to interpret this in Link's sense, that an isotopy is associated with a homogenous sphere of social action or experience, which is generated by the text, rather than determining it from the outside. Hence, though metaphors are potentially incommensurable elements in communication, isotopy within a text is one way in which coherence between metaphorical images can be generated. Another factor contributing to coherency is the fact that, as Link discusses<sup>13</sup>, metaphorical images typically partake of inter-discursive topoi that straddle both sociopolitical and purely literary discourse, and hence contribute to the symbolism mediating the identity of a community.

Of course, there will be many possible isotopies at various levels of a text (pragmatic, metaphoric, phonetic etc.), and in fictional texts like novels and poems, the relationships between them are highly complex. The same can be said of essays, the more so if they are serious about an experimental approach. The nature of the isotopies used, and the relations between them, may, therefore, be used to analyse how the discursive and the experimental (or reflexive) aspects of the texts are related to one another. For example, a text generating elaborated isotopies mainly on the metaphorical level approaches fiction<sup>14</sup>, while a text that does not will leave it to the reader to generate isotopies from the context of his or her social experience.<sup>15</sup> The analysis of the essays must aim to draw conclusions about the possible significance of Abe's use of isotopies in the light of the context in which his essays were published, including collective agenda and programmes.

This will have to be preceded by an account of the institutional context in which the texts were published, and this in turn by the broad discursive context of the age, dealing with literary issues of the postwar.

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<sup>13</sup> Link 1983, p. 11, 41, 73.

<sup>14</sup> This corresponds to the kind of autonomy of expression that in Link's parlance characterizes institutionalized literature.

<sup>15</sup> If such a text is examined for intra-textual cohesion, it will appear catachrestic, corresponding to Link's characterization of elementary literature.

This study will remain within the frame of the postwar, both ideologically and in terms of time. Of course, the term only provides an unambiguous date for the beginning, but not for the end. The end of the period to be examined is given by Abe's expulsion from the JCP at the beginning of 1962. Within this time frame, the investigation begins with a chapter dealing with the myths, ideologies and controversies of the postwar concerning literature, especially the significance of the myth of new beginning, of subjectivity, and of Communism and Marxism for this era. The second chapter will deal with artists' groups in which Abe was involved during this time, how they relate to the values and factions in the previous chapter, and what role Abe played in them. On this basis, the final chapter can analyse how his essays both articulate and embody literary agenda.

In Chapter I, the following aspects of *senjo* will be summarized: What is the significance of the myth of new beginning (if such it is or was) for the Japanese postwar, and what place was literature allotted? Particularly with regard to the theme of subjectivity, what ideological dichotomies and what factions arose from this? How did the Japan Communist Party draw from the principle of the new beginning, and what did it add to it? Finally, what changes took place in these relations, and can points in time be identified where debates and/or forms of organization permit sub-periods to be identified?

For the broad historical frame, I have drawn mainly on two essay collections published in the early 1990s, focusing on the meaning of the postwar for Japan: Ernestine Schlant's and J. Thomas Rimer's *Legacies and ambiguities* (Rimer/Schlant 1991), and Andrew Gordon's *Postwar Japan as history* (1993). Of interest from the first volume are in particular the contributions by Carol Gluck and Irmela Hijiya-Kirschner: In "The 'long postwar'", Gluck summarizes the significance of the idea of the postwar in Japan as zero hour, in particular with reference to definitions of its end, summarizing the ideology for which the term stood, and suggesting a series of sub-periods, defined by broad national and global sociopolitical events. This provides a useful system of basic co-ordinates to some extent for periodization in this study, but more still for the values associated with it and the significance of *senjo* as new beginning (c. f. I. 1). Hijiya-Kirschner ("The intellectual climate in Japan [...]") summarizes the rapid sequence of generations of writers, their conflicts and def-