

As We Saw Him: Masao Miyoshi and the Vocation of Critical Struggle

Harry Harootunian

In his academic lifetime, Masao Miyoshi was virtually a walking area studies program. It would be difficult to think of a better a model for the reconfiguration of area studies than the traces of his intellectual trajectory. As a Japanese educated in Japan's elite First Higher School, just before it was dismantled by the postwar US military occupation, and Tokyo University, he was an early exile (calling himself a "Japanese war bride") to the United States, where he completed his education in graduate schools with a PhD in English literature. By that time, he had already successfully embodied a knowledge that covered the literatures of three societies. In time, he would add to this inventory. Leaving Japan permanently in the early postwar years was Miyoshi's entry into the world at large. The force that lay behind the impulse to expand his acquisition of knowledge was probably an unrestrained restlessness that prompted a reaching out to know and understand areas and regions of social life that exceeded his chosen academic specialty of Victorian literature. Years later, he turned to photography to capture the various regions of the world he had come to

boundary 2 46:3 (2019) DOI 10.1215/01903659-7614111 © 2019 by Duke University Press

visit and know. In a display of this particular archive, exhibited at Duke University in 2013 after his death, it is possible to see that what he composed in photos (Miyoshi 2009) was already reflected in his intellectual and academic shifting that took him away from settled specialization to constantly pursue and discover what was out there and not here.

If Miyoshi left Japan behind as a condition of embracing a wider world, what remained with him was a sense of marginality he had experienced as a Japanese, which undoubtedly explains why he described this lifelong quest as a search for margins and thresholds that have escaped the received conventions of knowledge. For Miyoshi, the journey took him away from the claims of narrow expertise that reaffirmed the centrality of some societies over others to the mystery of what was out there but ignored, as he put it, to reach and encounter the “this that is not here.”

This is where he wanted to be and defined for him the field of inquiry he wanted to follow. In another time, he might have been called an exotic, looking for those places beyond the horizon of familiar cultures, knowing he would never grasp the mystery or penetrate it. But to describe Miyoshi in this way would be an unfair misrecognition. Behind this ceaseless search to gain access to what, for him, was not here but there loomed a continuous commitment to finding a critical compass that would immediately lead critique into forms of practice and action, whereby criticism and action would be actualized into a unified strategy of resistance—critical struggle—serving humans rather than only intellectuals and the demands of their culture. In this pursuit, Miyoshi was steered by his admiration of Noam Chomsky, Edward Said, and, later, David Harvey.

Miyoshi’s desire for the “this not here” was a declaration of solidarity with the marginal and its claims to visibility and equality. While he wanted to be other, his reasons for this desire differed vastly from those who merely sought to lose their own identity in some form of passing. His was a search for a presence that was not present. For those of us locked in the narrow and parochial world of a region defining area studies, an academic discipline still struggling with the promise of certainty guaranteed by a parochial knowledge but going nowhere, and fortunate to have known him, this is how we saw him and the kind of release his conception of criticism’s freedom and boundary transgression offered us by his example. In this regard, the critic Karatani Kōjin described him best when he renamed him the “trespasser,” a border crosser.

It is interesting to note that Miyoshi, after several decades of teaching English literature, experienced, like many Japanese scholars and intel-

lectuals before him, the imperative of an obligatory “return to Japan.” Physically, he had not returned to Japan for twenty-five years, but what I am referring to is not a metaphorical reembracing of his native land, constituting a reunion with Japan through its literary and aesthetic traditions. Unlike other Japanese who have made this sentimental journey to some imaginary reconstruction of Japan’s past in the present, his return to the “native place” was not permanent nor driven by any insurmountable nostalgia for a “lost Japan” but signaled only a momentary excursion to see and learn what had taken place in the years of absence. In the more classic examples of returning to Japan (*Nihon kaiki*), the reunion was an affective and intellectual reuniting with the native place (*kyōdo*) that announced a final rejection of a lifetime’s absorption in acquiring Western intelligence and the acknowledgment that such learning would always be superficial, resulting only in surface acquisition that distorted and bent one’s true nature. This Japanese distrust of foreign learning probably derived from the historical trauma of having Chinese culture imposed on an earlier and original native configuration of the world and the cosmos. The encounter with what appeared as a superior civilization and the ensuing adoption of its exemplars in language, thought, religion, and art has repetitively led to unscheduled reactions calling for a return to and embracing of truer traditional native sensibilities of the “lost home.”

By contrast, Miyoshi returned, after several decades of separation from Japan and things Japanese. His brief reencounter resembled the familiar trajectory of the ethnographer returning to the site of original fieldwork years later to see what had changed and what has remained the same. Miyoshi’s return was driven neither by a sentimental impulse compelling the search for the person he was when he left Japan nor by the usual cultural conceit motivating Japanese to reunite with what they believed they had abandoned and lost by turning to the destructive lures of Western learning. While it is difficult to know what persuaded Miyoshi to revisit Japan after so long an absence, both in his scholarly activities and his traveling back, it is conceivable that his solidarity with the margins, renamed as the Third World, was induced by the conviction that when he first left Japan in the early fifties, the country was still part of that peripheral world. Coming back twenty-five years later convinced him that Japan had left this earlier classification and had been moved up the scale to join the privileged rank of advanced capitalist nations—that is, it had become part of the center, at long last acquiring a position of equality, which, he observed, Japan was not always willing to accept. But, as he was to note in his later work, Japan

would continue to retain the trace of its earlier marginality in the continual repetition of appealing to haunting reminders of what it had left behind. I shall return to this point later.

Miyoshi's plunge back was already announced by the formation of a critical project concerning how Japan and its literature was being taught and written about in the United States. It was during this period that he wrote *Accomplices of Silence* (1974) and the magisterial *As We Saw Them* (1979). While his earlier book *The Divided Self* (1969) focused on Victorian writers, *Accomplices of Silence* concentrated on novels by prominent modern Japanese authors that already had been translated into English and were thus accessible to non-Japanese readers. With this sample of modern Japanese novelistic production (*shishōsetsu*), Miyoshi wanted particularly to illustrate how the preoccupation with the individualized self obstructed any consideration of the surrounding world that led to a studied silence about it. The problem Miyoshi grasped, which others had failed to see, demonstrated that what Japanese fashioned as a novel was more an attempt to fuse received literary conventions with the more formal models derived from the West.

In this regard, the retreat to the interiorized self constituted a solution to what might have appeared as an irresolvable cleft between a prior tradition of prose writing and the conventions of the modern novel. But the effort to accommodate native literary practice to the form of the modern, Western novel was further complicated by the intervening mediations of Japan's modernizing experience. Fredric Jameson has explained Miyoshi's achievement in the following way: "Masao Miyoshi's classic *Accomplices of Silence* marks the gap between the raw materials of Japanese social experience and these abstract formal patterns of Western novel construction that cannot always be welded together seamlessly" (2016: 286). Moreover, at the time this text appeared, Miyoshi also began recording his observations concerning the difficulty of maintaining dialogue and argument with Japanese that ultimately led him to see its connection to their indifference to and avoidance of criticism. In a sense, the novelistic fixation with a self that appeared unconcerned with the immediacy of the external world and the incidence of critical indifference are two sides of the same coin. *As We Saw Them* focused on the account of the first Japanese embassy to the United States in 1860 and how Japanese looked upon the Americans they encountered and saw themselves in this new relationship with others and their world. There is a recognizable identity between the book's subject, the first Japanese going to America and encountering Americans for the first

time, and what had been there and not here, and Miyoshi's own desired trajectory and experience.

When Miyoshi turned to explaining Japan's modern literature and the culture it authorized, his attitude toward the rethinking of Japan was reinforced by the recognition of the larger necessity of transfiguring the postwar discipline of area and regional studies. His engagement of area studies as a supposed discipline was preceded by his interest in ethnic studies, which grew out of his own commitment to the Third World liberation movement in the late 1960s and early 1970s on the University of California, Berkeley, campus and the struggle against the war in Vietnam and the university's administration. The immediate occasion was his criticism of the university's Oriental Languages and Literatures Department (as it was then called) and its treatment of students who claimed Asian ancestry and what he charged as their unfair treatment. These concerns led him to consider the larger question raised by area studies as it was being organized and taught in American universities and colleges, especially the graduate programs devoted to producing specialists in Asian studies. Japan had been in the train of new area studies programs in the United States after World War II, and Miyoshi acknowledged both the importance of broadening the world in which Japan had been resituated and the necessity of redefining its relationship to it. But early on, he noticed the transparent nature of a pseudodiscipline that appealed to representing regions and areas when they were in fact organized on the basis of single nation-states. He was responding to the practice of singularizing the study of Japan (or any so-called territory) as if it constituted a wider region or area, when in fact it was nothing more than a new version of national studies. Even in institutional centers that advertised programs that represented a cultural region like East Asia, the actual practice inevitably broke down into a national division of academic labor between China, Japan, and Korea.

Where area studies sought to differentiate itself from more established programs relating to Europe was to see nation/region as the field where students spent time gathering data for their research projects and using the native language in both their work and daily interactions with the nationals. The "field," as it was increasingly called among the cognoscenti and coreligionists of area studies, was, in fact, driven by an unacknowledged ethnographic unconscious constituted by an unsuitable mix of earlier conceits that had previously and habitually classified such regions as less advanced than Euro-America and the World War II obsession of collecting and gathering information concerning the enemy that led to the

establishment of service language schools in Japanese, Chinese, Russian, and other strategic and difficult languages. It should be noted that this sense of learning a difficult language was invariably identified with a less developed region and/or an enemy. At the heart of the purpose of area studies was information gathering, which was seen as a useful resource for the national security state during the Cold War epoch. But its apparent difficulty became a sign of an immense difference from the settled and familiar West. Gathering information became the principal purpose and resulted in undermining the ambition of comparability that area studies had initially pledged to pursue as its primary vocation. Instead of bringing the regions of the world together, it kept them separated and ranked according to putatively developmentalist schemes (Euro-American) determined by considerations vital to American interests in the Cold War. It was in this particular context that Miyoshi grasped the process by which Japan had been scaled upward, singularized and exceptionalized when it was promoted as a model for the unaligned to emulate rather than merely being consigned to the Third World and the recently decolonized, failing new nations. Miyoshi knew that Japan, America's former enemy, had managed to escape this dismal destiny by becoming one of the early charter members of the new American imperium inaugurating the Cold War. Moreover, it is important to keep in mind that area studies itself was the stunted offspring of World War II and nineteenth-century geography that arbitrarily organized societies according to older imperial borders and names that the military subsequently employed. In this regard, area studies simply denied the advice of an old Buddhist adage concerning the illusions of the world and thus a knowledge that there was no East and West, to remain chained to a fixed cartographic directional tyranny that sees the East as East, with all its attending prior associations of backwardness and marginality from the dominant centrality of starting from the West.

Miyoshi thus early grasped the fictitious claims of area studies, its fraudulent claims to disciplinary status, its metonymic substitution of the nation for the region, and the way its continued institutional existence in universities was linked to their capacity to secure funding from whatever source they could tap or hold up, which eventually included foreign governments and corporations, and, in the case of Japan, former fascist millionaires. But he clearly saw this as merely a symptom of the larger tendency of universities and colleges to succumb to the temptation to rededicate their putative "mission" by converting knowledge into intellectual property. This epochal transformation of the university was accompanied by and con-

nected to what Miyoshi early perceived as the simultaneous bankruptcy of the humanistic disciplines, which, instead of resolving the emergent crisis, turned to repetitiously valorizing the fetish of difference and separation. He would live to see the acceleration of this failure in institutions of higher learning and various private foundations, whereby the alleged “crisis of the humanities” itself became a regular commodity hawked for steady consumption as a substitute for encouraging any real effort to devise a conceivable solution. In an insular area studies, tainted by a fantasy representation and contaminated by its complicity with the national security state, Miyoshi saw the tightening of enclosures into insurmountable Chinese Walls. The initial disciplinary impulse that had sought to reconstitute their borders to make crossings easier resulted in further bolstering their “untrespassability” in the name of identity and difference. In his thinking, they—the humanistic disciplines—have accomplished nothing in the attempt to reimagine critical programs capable of accomplishing more than simply contesting the new role played by universities in their corporate function. This historical failure has resulted in confirming students as vital consumers in a menu of subjective identities emphasizing a plurality of differences (Miyoshi and Harootunian 2002: 15).

The clearest testament to this mission to reconfigure area studies into a form of critical intervention was Miyoshi’s essay “Japan Is Not Interesting,” from the year 2000, which also represents his last essay on Japan (Miyoshi 2010: 189–204). The major portion of my account of Miyoshi’s thinking is based on this essay. In this remarkable and prescient essay, Miyoshi reminded us of the consequences of narrow area specialization, deliberately withdrawing from the world of diversity, masking its knowledge of exceptional singularity as a metonymical substitute for the whole, and furthering its cognitive failing to align the gathering of local information with critical practices leading to involvement and intervention. His own attitude exemplified how practice united politics with scholarship, as he demonstrated in his own involvement in the Third World movement, previously mentioned, and his tireless work for the PLO that earned him the enmity of many of his colleagues in English and probably contributed to inducing him to take a chaired professorship at the University of California, San Diego. His practice was not simply a reflection of his eccentric personal style, as many of his contemporaries believed. In this essay, Miyoshi turned his sights on Japanese themselves, and whatever shortcomings he charged against them would rebound to the second order of practitioners of Japan-related studies, the foreign Japan specialists and what might be

called their single-minded dedication to the custodial care of an untroubled image of Japanese society. In the 1980s and 1990s, any criticism of Japanese society inevitably brought down an avalanche of denunciations of “Japan bashing” from professional Japan specialists, like Miyoshi’s former San Diego colleague Chalmers Johnson (who later changed his own position on Japan) and others who feigned scholarly outrage but who sounded more like carnival hawkers peddling the official line for Japan Inc., as if it was the real account and not the academic equivalent of snake oil. On the Japanese side, the indifference to criticism, he noted, was transmuted into accusation.

This anticritical reflex in Japan studies outside of Japan (as well as in Japan) was especially assured by the principal citadels of Japanese studies, already financially obliged to Japanese corporate donors, if not the Japanese state. Additionally, these academic bastions devoted to Japanese studies gestured toward a form of ancestor worship by naming them after pioneers in the field who may have also brought in money for the center, usually from Japan. Moreover, many of these centers were occupied by self-satisfied specialists who, like the ancestral founders they reproduced, had served the Japanese state and already won recognition from the Japanese imperial institution by being rewarded for performing loyal services to the emperor’s invisible empire that elevated them into one rank or another in the Order of the Rising Sun (*Kyokujitsu-shō*). Many of them constituted the front line of opposition in the United States against the appearance of critical opinion on Japan to become the designated gatekeepers of the official image, acting in the capacity of a surrogate chamber of commerce for Japan. It is important to note, in this connection, that even though Japan had been stripped of its extensive colonial empire after the Pacific War, the Japanese monarch (*tennō*) retained the title of emperor. He still presided over the invisible empire of deities and ancestors from which he had descended and derived his authority. In Miyoshi’s view, Japan specialists merely mirrored the image of Japan that Japanese wished to project and promote. The problem he identified was the disappearance of critical perspective and, as recorded in *As We Saw Them*, the role enacted by a tradition that encouraged reluctance toward the act of interpretation. If Miyoshi reported dissatisfaction with his former homeland, he was particularly troubled by the way Japanese thinking about themselves had been reflected in scholarship and writing by non-Japanese, namely Americans. Apparently, in this connection, Miyoshi dismissed Karatani Kōjin’s lecture titled “Japan Is Interesting because Japan Is Not Interesting” (even though

he had not read it) because he concluded that, when considered from the perspective that Japan is not interesting, it could *in fact* be said to be of some interest (Miyoshi and Yoshimoto 2007: 290–91).

As a precedent, if not template, for the kind of argument he wanted to make, Miyoshi returned to Victorian England to draw upon the critical writings of Matthew Arnold to formulate his own assessment of why Japan was no longer interesting. Arnold, in the late 1880s, had struck out against American civilization for its lack of “the interesting.” The object of his critique targeted a rejection of America’s decentralized democracy and its unerring aptitude for stunting lasting cultural growth, a failure to uphold standards of elegance and refinement that would only invite the reproduction of unrestrained cultural dilution. Recognizing the temporal distance separating Arnold from himself, but not overlooking the class conceits that succeeded to creep into Arnold’s critical writings, Miyoshi wondered if Japan, like the United States, lacked the truly “interesting” in national life. He concluded that its absence derived not from the character of its democratic endowment but from the nonappearance of dissent and protest. Here Miyoshi may have overstated Japan’s new American-sponsored democratic vocation. While the US military occupation supplied Japanese society with a new political template, complete with a new constitution written by non-Japanese, it remained a political solution to Japan’s errant prewar order, imposed by foreigners in record-breaking time on top of the basic components of the earlier sociopolitical configuration that had managed to produce fascism, imperialism, and war in Asia and the Pacific. In this regard, the return of the past was the reappearance of history’s contamination of the present.

The occupation provided Japan with an infrastructure of democratic procedures that, because it was imposed from the outside over the principal components of an older prewar configuration, created the figure of a palimpsest that allowed the older elements of the past to enter the present’s surface. The occupation’s policies were far from achieving a substantive transformation that would have required thorough removal of the retained remnants of the older order that continued to contaminate the democratic imaginary. Even in the new Japanese constitution, often described as more democratic than the US Constitution, the drafters retained the position of the emperor as the symbol of unity of the Japanese people, which referred not to a free citizenry that has demanded constitutional representation but to an emperor who has been reassigned a new role to symbolize a unified “nation’s people” (*kokumin*). Because a unified nation’s people was

an abstraction that had no real historical existence as a sovereign political agent, the alleged symbolic emperor could not refer to anything outside of himself. An appeal to such an abstract conception of popular sovereignty now assigned to the Japanese people had never existed historically, serving as the subjective agent positioned to bring about a constitution. The retention of the emperor as a symbolic figure merely constituted a ghostly reminder of the older Meiji Constitution of 1890, which had been enacted as a gift by the emperor to the nation's people, who became his subjects (*shinmin*). With this image of an overstated Japanese democracy, Miyoshi correctly implied the importance of an existing democratic subjectivity that would substantively anchor or ground the sociopolitical system in the individual's rights of critical dissent and protest. In this respect, his political sensibilities were assailed by the spectacle of Japan's steady slide into a frozen cultural emanation—culturalism—that was supposed to explain how Japanese were different from others and how this cultural difference remained as an unchanging immanence immune to history. In other words, beneath the palimpsest's surface procedural democracy, one inflicted by foreigners, persisted a deeper layer comprised of a vast timeless cultural configuration that had not changed since the Stone Age and could easily make its way to the present to continue determining Japanese conduct and supplying the correct knowledge with which to relate to the world. This unchanging cultural configuration yielded a timeless totalizing knowledge that offered the surety of certainty that would both discourage and foreclose the necessity of all criticism.¹

In the essay "Japan Is Not Interesting," Miyoshi explained that he talked with several representatives from different social strata of Japanese society and concluded that a vacuum of cultural ideas persevered in contemporary Japan (Miyoshi 2010: 191–95). Japan is uninteresting, he asserted, because it is commonly known that in Japan's culture and society, there are wise men (*kunshi*) who are unable to animate and move anyone (Miyoshi and Yoshimoto 2007: 286). What appears lacking in Japan, answering his question, is "dialogue" generated over a topic of conversation, the absence of any genuine aptitude for argumentation. This criticism of various types of Japanese and the incapacity of Japanese society to generate true dialogic encounters prefigured his own later difficulties with Nobel Laureate

1. See Arai 2016 for a compelling and penetrating account of the role performed by psychology and education in operationalizing this knowledge into a remedial ideology for a neoliberal Japan.

Ōe Kenzaburo, in whom he—Miyoshi—had invested great expectations of activism that he believed the writer had failed to fulfill. He had already given up on Ōe's writings, which, he confessed, he increasingly found unreadable. In his discussions with Yoshimoto, he recalls a later interview of the writer Murakami Haruki in the *New York Times*, where the novelist self-importantly declared that in Japan, it has been said that he—Murakami—is a dissenter. For Miyoshi, this only meant that authoritative and knowledgeable people in the literary world had not yet seriously accepted him. Murakami is said to have laughed off Miyoshi's slight; Miyoshi's response to Murakami was that laughing it off was not an argument. Along the way, he—Miyoshi—replied to his face that he thought Murakami was an entertainer (*yokyōka*) and his work worthless (Miyoshi and Yoshimoto 2007: 287–88).

Miyoshi linked the emptiness of this cultural malaise to an observation that pointed to a disproportionate balance between the behavior of large numbers of Japanese tourists traveling abroad and the few foreigners who visited Japan. Everywhere he looked he saw nothing but the signs of somnolent stagnation and cultural self-satisfaction, and he wondered why Japan, at the time the second-largest economy in the world, was getting no respect from the United States, Great Britain, and France, which meant no expression of interest. If the question was why foreigners had no interest in touring Japan, the answer could be found in what he considered the miasma of a debilitating discourse on national identity, whose presupposition had preceded the program of constructing a modern society. This discourse subsequently underscored the importance of a preoccupation with exceptionality of the nation-form, drawing its strength from a long-standing tradition of island isolation and a growing nativism initially spurred by Japan's intensely accelerated contact with the West and the threat of slipping into the colonial status of its Asian neighbors.

Despite a devastating war in Asia and the Pacific, defeat, and reconstruction, Miyoshi argued, the Japanese national *amour propre* and the obsessive fascination with a singularized collective identity and ideology of a unitary and homogeneous ethnicity never disappeared. In fact, it remained such a powerful force that it could strengthen itself at the expense of entertaining other alternatives demanded by changing historical circumstances. Owing to Japan's own growing colonial empire in Asia before the war, it was widely believed that Japanese, like other Asians, were constituted of heterogeneous ethnicities. The idea of a homogeneous race surfaced only after World War II as a support of what many believed was a damaged sense of national identity. Cultural discourse on what it meant to be Japa-

nese was literally empowered to choke off any threat of other possibilities. The problem, as Miyoshi saw it, was a pervasive form of nationalism, condensed in the phrase “We Japanese” (*Wareware Nihonjin*), which seems to have been invested with amuletic powers whenever uttered, deployed as if it was a magical incantation, a mantra, empowered to immediately summon the whole arsenal of exceptional difference derived from mythic origins that are invoked whenever conversations and writings turn to other peoples, however obliquely and indirectly.

Miyoshi overlooked in this insightful observation the fact that the impulse bringing forth the chant “We Japanese” was driven by an imperative to always compare Japan, a kind of automatic reflex derived from having been compelled to live comparatively as a result of the intimate contact with the West, the earlier Chinese civilization, and, undoubtedly, the dominance of Americanization in the long postwar. It could be seen as a form of “colonization of the mind,” even though Japanese haven’t seen it that way. In this respect, the insistent repetition of an emblematic identity was a necessary reminder and reinforcement of Japanese difference as a sure preventative from its immanent disappearance before the foreign other. According to Miyoshi, the invocation really means Japan, not, as such, the Japanese people and refers generally to everyday life, not as a fixed dogma but rather as a structure of feeling or common sense, which he considered dangerous because it represses history. Its danger lay in its capacity to bring forth an explosion of “repetitious synonyms and verbosity” without whatsoever signifying any meaning (Miyoshi and Yoshimoto 2007: 335). The importance of this common reflex, which came without saying as it goes without saying, was its capacious power to link businessmen, capitalists, and managers of Japan’s consumer society to the benefit of the political classes. The recitation of “We Japanese” did not mean or even call for the activation of mutual cooperation but, to the contrary, was used to suppress the real sense of unconcern toward people without capital and power. It resulted in the figuration of an entire ideology of Japanism (*Nihonshugi*) constituted of older staples such as cherry blossoms and sliced raw fish (*sashimi*). Miyoshi reminded readers that in the United States, the phrase “We Americans” is never used as a repetitious mantra.

At the heart of this empowering ideology of national identity appeared the authority of the imperial institution enabled by the US decision during the occupation to retain the emperor (Hirohito) and absolve him of all war responsibility and guilt. In no time at all, the divine monarch shed his inherited charisma derived from an indeterminate archaic time to

slip into the slippers of a petit bourgeois family man, spending his spare time puttering with hydroids. Even though in this essay Miyoshi gestured toward addressing the role played by the emperor in the reconstruction of a cultural discourse in the immediate postwar, he was particularly concerned with the intimate relationship between the imperial institution and the organization of the Japanese sociopolitical order. He also recognized in the increasing closing down of any criticism of the emperor a prefiguration of the larger banishment of a critical attitude. In the case of the emperor, criticism invariably risks the threat of coercion leading to injury, intimidation, job loss, and even ostracism, which undoubtedly enforced the larger move of ridding Japanese society of all criticism, which, in Miyoshi's opinion, meant closing off all possibility of resistance. It should be recalled that the emperor had been considered a "living deity" until Japan's defeat in 1945 and his later disavowal of divinity. But the disavowal hardly dissuaded Japanese from forgetting his claim to divinity overnight as a descendant of the sun goddess. Moreover, the decision to retain him and the imperial household meant that he would continue to preside over all those rites and rituals that would connect contemporary Japan to its archaic origins and their principal purpose of beckoning the national deities and ancestors to maintain the well-being and good fortune of the country and expressing thanks for such blessings. In other words, the regular rituals the emperor performed immediately called attention to his divinity, since it was such divine embodiment in the first place that guaranteed their successful enactment. Hence, retaining the emperor resituated the archaic exemplar of the unification of politics and society in the modern present. It is in this way that the new symbolic emperor, who was supposed to refer to the unity of the "nation's people," referred to himself. These rituals functioned to elicit continuing good fortune and bounty for the nation from the deities, binding emperor and people into a unified collective purpose, reflecting the archaic principle that made no distinction between the performance of religious rituals and governance. The emperor's performance of these archaic rituals and ceremonies also signified conducting political affairs. In spite of the occupation's attempt to separate religion and politics, then, the reinstating of the imperial figure insured both the continuing identity of the two in the body of the emperor and the archaic power of divinity that mandated this combination of sovereign authority as the basis of all legitimation.

By the same measure, rescuing and salvaging the imperial institution was accompanied by the occupation's decision to actively return large numbers of prewar bureaucrats to positions of power, which further guar-

anted the continuation of the principal governmental form of the old order. Empowered to perform rituals and ceremonies as forms of governance, an investiture of authority that he—the emperor—alone embodied, trumping all other exercises of legitimation, any act or utterance would thus constitute a representation of the unity or identity of interests of the political and social communities, which, in him, were conflated and remained indistinguishable. In other words, state and civil society were cemented into a singular and undifferentiated identity, and the putative will of the people was “integrated” with the will of the emperor (at least in the Japanese translation of the constitution). The importance of the emperor embodying both politics and the social, for Miyoshi, lay in its authorization of a discourse on identity, reflecting a virtual cultural unconscious, which saw the emperor and the Japanese people stretching back in an unbroken lineage to divine origins and its exceptional claim to a reign of unchanging timelessness.

In fact, this arrangement, according to Miyoshi, was continually enhanced and fostered by the US military occupation precisely because it acknowledged in its midst a reminder of a “visible dominant other,” an unfamiliar alterity that had to be made familiar. That is to say, the image of the Japanese had to be dramatically and rapidly transmuted from the unfamiliar and strange, which required altering the dehumanized wartime enemy into a familiar and comfortable friend and inverting the previous slogans admonishing the population to fight to the final end, urging national unity and the demands of total sacrifice, into their postwar opposite, calling for “penitence,” the formation of “peace nation,” “culture nation,” even “atomic bomb nation,” whereby Japanese claimed nuclear victim status. Here is the nub of Miyoshi’s critique of the absence of criticism in Japan, leveled first against an army of occupation that often callously and thoughtlessly pursued a transformation of Japan that was more window dressing than a program directed at the realization of substantive change. On the other hand, Miyoshi had no reluctance in charging the Japanese with accepting the lures of a devil’s promise, which resulted in bringing the country within the precinct of the new American imperium. His complaint was really directed against a long history that had repeatedly demonstrated Japan’s willingness to bend to the blandishments of what appeared as a superior culture and surrender its own particularistic difference to the guarantee of incorporation into another putative universalism whose claims were no less the product of a specific cultural formation than its own. He also knew that in these epochal cultural transactions, it was always the political elites that benefited. With the US occupation, Miyoshi noticed that the Japanese

willingness to capitulate constituted an ideological frame predisposed to manufacturing “consensus,” with which the privileged and empowered of Japanese society (all those prewar bureaucrats and businessmen who escaped jail sentences handed out by the War Crimes Tribunal) were restored to their previous positions. In Miyoshi’s view, this return of the principal personnel of the prewar system meant they would occupy positions that enabled them to successfully manipulate the political process, concealing the scandal of difference, unevenness, and inequality.

This image of a smooth and unruffled social order in Japan managed by experts was also exported to the United States, where it was valorized in a number of ways, culminating in Ezra Vogel’s best-selling book (in Japan and the United States), absurdly titled (for Japanese consumption, to be sure) *Japan as Number One* (1979). But if Vogel’s book provided double service to both the American national security state and Japan, Inc., and undoubtedly made his views particularly welcome in both societies, one lone reviewer in the pages of the *New York Review of Books* called it for what it was, exposing its content as ideological trash serving both American and Japanese political interests.

Miyoshi saw through the haze of this fantasy image, which he believed sought to demonstrate the success of the democratic process exemplified by Japan’s rapid and successful reconstruction of the country from the ruins of defeat. But the fantasy worked to reveal the exceptionalist native genius that was now paradoxically offered up as a model worthy of imitation among emerging non-aligned nations in the Cold War struggle. Here, he returned to the role of the emperor and rightly pointed to the one effective instrument of control that managed to keep itself veiled yet passed for an unchanging and unpolitical cultural essence, both communal and permanent. At the core of this unpolitical cultural politics was, of course, the restored emperor, who now, as previously mentioned, symbolized the unity of the Japanese “nation’s people.” During the early years of the postwar, several writers and thinkers, such as the novelist Mishima Yukio and philosopher Tanabe Hajime, proposed that the emperor authorized the making of culture but remained outside of the actual historical process of production, which meant he was both in and out of time. Hence, the emperor was empowered to simultaneously perform in such ways that his enactment fused religious rituals, the ceremony of governance, and the production of culture. As a result, he stood at the top of a pyramid organized into a lasting hierarchy of social classes, compelling the expectation that all segments cohere in this tight communal configuration founded on archaic

tribal familistic principles. All, moreover, looked to this Arnoldian conception of culture that permits no disagreement, dissent, or opposition. In this connection, it is important to mention that Miyoshi's good friend Karatani Kōjin took exception with Miyoshi's blanket dismissal of dissent in Japan by claiming he had overstated it by overlooking instances of protest and mobilized demonstrations.

Yet I think Miyoshi was more right than wrong, inasmuch as his analysis explained the reasons for the absence of genuine dissensus formed by the relationship of criticism to the practical struggle of resistance in Japan that Karatani's defense failed to address. Moreover, Karatani's critique by itself could not persuasively show either moments of effective resistance or lasting forms of opposition against the state, but only reaction responses prompted by the immediacy of events that just as quickly dissipated, as the recent example of Fukushima and the spreading dangers of nuclear toxicity amply show. Miyoshi also perceived in this hermetically sealed social scheme (which also resembled the structure of a political Ponzi scheme) the reasons for Japan's removal from its world and the consequential inability to grasp the nature of its isolation. "Culturally and intellectually," he wrote, "the endless regurgitation of Japan's 'tradition' produces nothing that stirs any new enthusiasm" (Miyoshi 2010: 201). It yields nothing but interminable boredom and the lack of the "interesting."

Miyoshi discovered only a few "interesting" people, who, like himself, I would add, were still capable of serious criticism and dissent. But he knew they remained invisible, as he remained distant, remote, and often inaudible from the scene he addressed. What troubled him most about this Japanese example he set before his readers was recognition of the spectacle of people reluctant to talk about any issue other than their own identities in fear of misrepresentation. He saw no discernible kinship between the Japanese obsession with their self-identity, repeating its distinguishing features like a religious chant, as if even a momentary lapse would result in its disappearance, and signifying an indifference to others because it always leads to misunderstanding. Aware of an earlier area studies paradigm that sought to represent others, even at the price of trying to make them look like us, Japan became America's Dr. Moreau's island, a laboratory whereby unconstrained experimentation was conducted to transform lower forms of animal life into humans. It was this episode that prefigured the formation of the subsequently expanded model announcing America's worldly mission to militarily intervene everywhere in what now has resulted in innumerable catastrophically failed attempts at nation formation. Yet Miyoshi also knew

that representation was a hazardous dodge and dangerous exercise, just as he was convinced that self-representation belonged to no privileged and authoritative group, that it was pointless to serve as proxy patriotic custodians of another's culture and history.

If he acknowledged, as we must today, that it is precisely this new nativist move that has increasingly occupied the place vacated by the older model of area studies, which lost its purchase with the end of the Cold War, it is also necessary to recognize that along the way it disclosed an imperial conceit and intellectual bankruptcy long before. This is not to say that Miyoshi approved of its function, which he knew shared the same avoidance of criticism as the Japanese preoccupation with identity and a thoughtless "social scientific" acceptance of the most retrograde authoritarian political forms as a step to realizing liberal government, now misrecognized as "democracy" (Tanaka 2002: 102). Paradoxically, this was an inversion of Marxism, which has argued that liberalism leads to oligarchic and authoritarian rule—that is, fascism. Instead, Miyoshi turned away from such negativity to concentrate on the invisible and neglected minorities that majorities invariably overlook and called for an alliance of all the "exploited," despite the claims of difference. This has become the silhouette of another possible conception of area studies, one that might possess the capacity of upholding opposition of any ethnic and cultural group to privatize and monopolize its identity as a permanent emanation.

Above all else, Miyoshi dedicated himself to acting on this perception, by opposing a scholarship devoted to maintaining this image and as a practical activist pledged to changing its terms. "For," as he put it, "the only alliance that is needed now is the alliance of all the exploited, regardless of the categories of difference" (Miyoshi 2010: 204).² The defect of indifference he first observed in Japan he saw reflected and reenacted in the United States. And it was his sensitivity to its appalling consequences for both countries that ultimately guided him through the thicket of American academic hypocrisy, the runaway curricular confusion brought on by its commodification and the swamp of routinized administrative corruption masquerading as "leadership" to reinforce his conviction that thinking critically and finding ways to put it into practice were indistinguishable—that is, they were one and the same thing. This is how some of us came to see and know him, and his example offered a gift in the only worthwhile lesson on

2. See also Miyoshi and Yoshimoto 2007: 342, 345, where the only category of importance for Miyoshi is humanity (*ningen*).

which to found a lasting educational project that he feared was already slipping from the scene. In this regard, he more than fulfilled the requirement of “practical struggle,” which Gilles Deleuze proposed when he explained why “revolution never proceeds by way of the negative” (1994: 208). “Practical struggle,” he advised, “never proceeds by way of the negative but by way of difference and its power of affirmation, and the war of the righteous is for the conquest of the highest power, that of deciding problems by restoring them to their truth, by evaluating that truth beyond the representations of consciousness and the forms of the negative, and by acceding at last to their imperatives on which they depend” (208). Because he was who he was, as we saw him, Miyoshi left Japan for other fields of experience and other cultures in distress, and ultimately turned his attention toward the coming irresolvable ecological crisis, which would preoccupy his energies to the last.

References

- Arai, Andrea. 2016. *The Strange Child: Education and the Psychology of Patriotism in Recessionary Japan*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Deleuze, Gilles. 1994. *Repetition and Difference*. Translated by Paul Patton. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Jameson, Fredric. 2016. *The Modernist Papers*. London: Verso.
- Miyoshi, Masao. 1969. *The Divided Self: A Perspective on the Literature of the Victorians*. New York: New York University Press.
- . 1974. *Accomplices of Silence: The Modern Japanese Novel*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- . 1979. *As We Saw Them: The First Japanese Embassy to the United States (1860)*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- . 2009. *This Is Not Here: Selected Photography*. Los Angeles: highmoonoon.
- . 2010. *Trespases: Selected Essays by Masao Miyoshi*. Edited by Eric Cazdyn. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Miyoshi, Masao, and H. D. Harootunian, eds. 2002. *Learning Places: The Afterlives of Area Studies*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Miyoshi, Masao, and Mitsuhiro Yoshimoto. 2007. *Teiko no ba e [Sites of Resistance]*. Kyoto, Japan: RakuHoku shuppan.
- Tanaka, Stefan. 2002. “Objectivism and the Eradication of Critique in Japanese History.” In *Learning Places: The Afterlives of Area Studies*, edited by Masao Miyoshi and H. D. Harootunian, 80–102. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Vogel, Ezra. 1979. *Japan as Number One: Lessons for America*. New York: Harper and Row.