

THE LIMINAL SUBJECT IN THE WORK OF ABE KŌBŌ

by

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(Under the Direction of Dr. Masaki Mori)

ABSTRACT

Japanese author Abe Kōbō's body of work problematizes the relationship between the individual and the community within modernity. This relationship is based on outdated modes of defining subjectivity that anchor an individual's identity to its place within a social field. In the modern world, traditional communal formations have been replaced with structures such as the nation-state or vast urban centers. The nature of the relationship with the individual has not essentially changed, however. This thesis examines three of Abe's novels, written in the ten-year period from 1957 to 1967, and characterizes their progression as a search for a new subjectivity that can break away from past methods of individuation that center on an ideal home community such as the nation. Using Deleuze and Guattari's concept of the nomad, I show that Abe wanted to find a subjectivity that could transgress and survive outside the boundaries of normative group structures.

INDEX WORDS: Abe Kōbō, subject, identity, nomad, Deleuze and Guattari, modernity, social field, nation-state

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this to my wife Mana for her unflagging love, patience, and support while I complete my degree.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Much of Japanese author Abe Kōbō's oeuvre is an attempt to encapsulate the individual's position within modernity and relationship to the community, one that in Abe's work is defined by the subjectification of the individual as a member of a nation-state. Identity is based fully on a set of totalizing ideological ideals placed upon the subject from without and is dependent on the continued ability of the community to enforce its meaning. Abe's question is whether or not the individual can exist without the community. That is, whether it is possible for a subject to transgress the boundaries of normalized social identity and survive without an external notion of self such as that provided by the social field. These boundaries take a number of forms within his literature. They always serve to stabilize and restrict interstitial movement and to dictate identity to those caught within them.

Early on in Abe's work, these borders are those of the nation-state, a social formation of the modern era that developed as ruling power shifted away from feudal forms of governance and more towards bureaucratic control over a unified and homogenized national population. Japan's modernization included drastic reconfigurations of state organs and bureaucratic systems that came to resemble those of Western powers. Japanese identity underwent similar changes so that the nature of being Japanese was defined through cultural and ideological boundaries that stood in opposition to other, non-Japanese nation-states. It would be incorrect

to say that Japan did not have anything resembling state apparatuses before the Meiji Restoration in the early 19th century. By that point, there were already a strong class hierarchy, an extensive consumer economy, and a complex taxation system. However, in “the 1850s Japanese social and political institutions bore little resemblance to those of the great imperial powers. Japan lacked anything resembling a modern centralized state” (Ravina *State-Making* 87). At this point, the word *kokka*, now translated as “state”, “could refer to a variety of institutions ranging from the ancient Chinese kingdoms, to the shogunate, to a large domain”. Likewise, the word *kuni*, generally taken to mean “country”, could mean entities as diverse as kingdoms, provinces, and domains” (Ravina *Land* 13). It is not until the late 19th and early 20th centuries that Japan began trying to solidify its political borders, enclosing everyone within them as Japanese subjects. Ethnic groups located beyond the territorial borders of the Tokugawa shogunate that were once thought of as foreigners and barbarians eventually became linguistically labeled as natives. Term changes such as calling the Ainu people “*dojin*, or ‘natives’ ... thus symbolically incorporated the Ainu as the (Japanese) local people in Hokkaidō and relocated the realm of barbarism outward beyond their homeland, the Ezochi” (Howell 119). The Ainu, among other ethnic groups, were assimilated into the Japanese state.

The consolidation of formerly disparate populations into a single national identity proved far smoother for Japan than in other nation-state formations due to “the relatively high degree of Japanese ethnocultural homogeneity,” “the unique antiquity of the imperial house ... and its emblematic Japanese-ness,” and the fact

that contact from Western powers “was abrupt, massive, and menacing enough for most elements of the politically-aware population to rally behind a programme of self-defence conceived in the new national terms” (Anderson 95-6). The nationalizing processes that had begun in the 18th century in the western world occurred in a much shorter period of time in Meiji Era Japan as there was already a ready-made model to copy from, as well as a relatively homogenous population that was quickly placed in a confrontation with a threatening other.

Japan’s birth as a modern nation-state, and the subsequent subjectification of its people as unified Japanese, formed a spirit of nationalism that “took on an aggressive imperialist character” (Anderson 97) wherein Japan claimed the right to emulate Western imperial powers and annex or colonize neighboring territory in the name of imperial expansion. As Japan entered the colonialist arena, that nationalist ideological form prompted even more fiercely the “interpellation of individuals as subjects” (Althusser 175), and became “an a priori condition of the communication between individuals (the ‘citizens’) and between social groups – not by suppressing all differences, but by relativizing them and subordinating them to itself in such a way that it is the symbolic difference between ‘ourselves’ and ‘foreigners’ which wins out and which is lived as irreducible” (Balibar 347). The Japanese became an idealized community based on genealogical roots, attachment to a specific geographical location, and a shared language. Thus, a territory annexed by Japan might be part of the Japanese empire and yet its citizens would never be considered Japanese:

In the interwar years Koreans, Taiwanese and Manchurians, and, after the outbreak of the Pacific War, Burmese, Indonesians and Filipinos, were subjected to policies for which the European model was an established working practice. And just as in the British Empire, Japanified Koreans, Taiwanese or Burmese had their passages to the metropole absolutely barred. They might speak and read Japanese perfectly, but they would never preside over prefectures in Honshū, or even be posted outside their zones of origin. (Anderson 98-9)

Japanese identity was tied directly to the concept of a unified homeland. Anyone genealogically bound to the physical land within the ideological national borders was immediately interpellated as a Japanese citizen regardless of whether they actually identified themselves as being Japanese. Likewise, anyone without this connection was permanently barred from ever enjoying the same status as a Japanese. They were subjects of the Japanese empire, but not citizens of the Japanese nation-state.

Although it is difficult to view Abe Kōbō as an author concerned with Japanese nationality in particular, it is this identification of the individual as a Japanese citizen, created through state ideology and rooted to a perceived homeland, which Abe directly experienced in his youth. Although born in Tokyo, Abe spent much of his young life in Manchuria during the Japanese occupation. He stayed briefly in Hokkaido, where his mother was from, to avoid the fighting in 1931 that resulted in the Mukden Incident. This was the point wherein the Japanese government accused Chinese dissidents of attempting to sabotage Japanese railway

line in order to publicly justify a full-scale invasion. Thus, Abe spent the bulk of his formative years in “perhaps the only frontier lands many Japanese would ever have really experienced, the only places where the significance of ‘being Japanese’ was not a pre-existing given” (Iles 23). Abe could see much more clearly than most the Japanese ideological state apparatuses working to imprint Japaneseness on him. His educational curriculum in Manchuria was based on what the Imperial Japanese Ministry of Education dictated, with an image of Japaneseness represented through natural beauty and social harmony, two items distinctly absent in the Manchurian plains.

The Japanese state ideology, distilled through the educational and nationalistic apparatuses, served to “represent the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence” (Althusser 162). The imperial education taught Abe that to be Japanese meant to live as part of a harmonious and stable community, which the reality around him directly contradicted. Although the Japanese government proclaimed Manchuria to be a place of equality between the five races¹, Abe saw racism perpetrated wherever he looked. Likewise, the Manchurian plains little resembled the cherry blossoms and natural beauty described in his textbooks. In the end, “Japanese nationality was something his teachers placed *on* him, like a uniform which refused to fit properly” (Iles 25). It is this process of producing the individual “instituted as *homo nationalis* from cradle to grave” (Balibar 345) that Abe problematized throughout his life and work.

¹ The five races or ethnic groups were Japanese, Han Chinese, Mongols, Koreans, and

The identity provided by this official nationalism tried to create a total subject based on imagined ideas of an ideal Japanese citizen. Abe saw the desire to root this identity into a geographic location, such as Japan, as a holdover from times when a community was linked to the land where it settled: “older bonds were formed during simpler times, when villages operated as communal groupings of kinsmen. Such phrases as these cannot describe modern cities ...” (Iles 7). Abe saw this mode of existence, roped off by ideological boundaries, as insufficient and outdated in the chaotic turbulence of modernity:

[The modern atmosphere is one] of agitation and turbulence, psychic dizziness and drunkenness, expansion of experiential possibilities and destruction of moral boundaries and personal bonds, self-enlargement and self-derangement, phantoms in the street and in the soul – [it] is the atmosphere in which modern sensibility is born.

(Berman 18)

This process of modernization is too rapid, however, and the methods in which people are formed into subjects have yet to develop in a way that can benefit from or even survive the torment of modern experience. Individuation remains rooted in rigid systems of identity formation with the community at its heart. Thus, Abe came to see the modern individual as trapped within attempts by the state to territorialize and anchor existence as a subject to a national signifier. Abe develops this struggle from early on in his career through the leitmotif of movement versus stability or static existence. He uses this contrast to try to articulate the manner in which society offers both protection and rigidity in the face of the external chaos.

Early on in his writing career, Abe quickly began forming his thematic connections between collective systems and rootedness or stability as opposed to disconnected, isolated wandering and chaotic movement. Two early short stories that are useful in illustrating this conflict are his 1949 work “Dendrocacalia” and a story called “The Red Cocoon” (Jpn: Akai mayu) published in a collection *Walls* (Jpn: Kabe) in 1950.

In “Dendrocacalia,” a man, known only as Common, finds himself beginning to turn into a plant. This transformation is foreshadowed by a feeling that his face has turned inside out and includes a sensation of being rooted to ground: “He felt the firm tug of gravity. He felt glued to the spot, as if attached there. He *was* attached” (Abe *Dendrocacalia* 44). Soon after his first transformation, a dark-suited man, called only K and who reveals himself to be the director of the Botanical Garden, begins to pursue Common with the hope of planting him in the garden as a rare specimen. Initially resistant, Common goes to the gardens in order to kill the director. Once there, however, he finds himself powerless to resist and ends up planted and tagged with the label *Dendrocacalia crepidifolia*.

Common’s transformation into a plant is not merely a process of dehumanization but also an expression of the manner in which subjectivity within modern society is, in this case literally, rooted into an immobile position. K calls plants “the very roots of Logos” (Abe *Dendrocacalia* 60), connecting this mode of existence with rationality, structure and order. It is an existence guaranteed by the state as K repeatedly assures Common that the gardens are “Government protected” and “state supported” (60-1). That is, this stability continues only under the

auspices of state structures. These structures, such as the Botanical Garden, disseminate the ideology that plants, and therefore existence as a plant, “restore harmony to our dissipated hearts and bring cleanliness and beauty to our streets” (50). This harmony is in contrast with the chaos of the modern city streets that Common sees:

Gradually the activity outside seemed to quicken, growing more intense, surpassing his ability to take it in. Were his consciousness able to keep pace with the constant stream of motion, he should be able to grasp it in static terms as a series of still scenes, but something was the matter. In his lagging consciousness, every movement left a dim trail. Was this what it meant to have your head swim? It was as if an intricate piece of cut glass were spinning around and around, creating a dazzling display of light. The vast assortment of cars and bicycle-drawn carts, and of pedestrians with their different clothes and styles of walking, faded gradually to gray shadow, dissolving and merging in the layers of brilliance. (49)

Common is unable to process the unfiltered movement of urban modernity. Instead, he feels that it is more natural to exist as a plant, firmly rooted and comfortable, if not happy. As K says: “But what difference do happiness and unhappiness make, anyway? They don’t matter in the least” (60).

Common feels that the transformation is an easy one and, in the end, he lacks the will to oppose it and meekly submits himself to K. At this point the narrator interjects, “Oh Common, you were wrong pal. You were not the only one to have

those seizures; you didn't know it, but people everywhere are subject to that disease, enough to make a world!" (63). The condition of modern communities is that their subjects are forced into the comfortable, if not happy, existence of rooted plants in order to fend off the overwhelming and fractured flow of modern life. The state, in this case through the apparatus of the Botanical Garden, advertises the ideology that plant-like existence contributes to harmony and peace, and it encourages the transformation of citizens who, like Common, are unable to remain human. Looking through Greek mythology for examples of transformations into plants, Common concludes: "Transformation into a plant meant avoiding unhappiness, at the cost of future happiness; salvation from sin meant being through into the midst of Sin. These were not the laws of human beings but the laws of the slaves of Zeus. Oh for a newer and stronger Promethean fire!" (58). He uses the image of losing the fire of Prometheus to symbolize the loss of the will to live an individual life through the decision to become rooted. Common's own name points both to this as a universal experience, as well as to his existence as merely average.

K says to Common: "In my own opinion, plants are the answer to schizophrenia. They are the hope of our age. The gods of modern times. Large numbers of hysterical people will become believers and emulate them" (59). For Abe, similar to Deleuze and Guattari, schizophrenia is "our characteristic malady, the malady of our era" (Deleuze & Guattari *Anti-Oedipus* 34). It is a disconnected and deterritorialized existence that does not adhere to the signifying and normalizing codes of the modern socius. It is also a source of creative potential, however. Like the Promethean fire, it allows for progress towards the creation of a new kind of

civilization that does not try to tie subjectivity to the transcendental signifier of the state or homeland.

In the 1950 short story “The Red Cocoon,” Abe Kōbō more clearly juxtaposes constant, wandering movement with a settled form of domestic existence. The unnamed narrator, a homeless man, ceaselessly walks the streets between houses, each of which exists “without disappearing, without changing shape, stand motionless on the earth’s surface” (Abe *Akai mayu* 142)². In direct contrast to the homes are the interstitial streets that “continue to change without holding any one fixed face” (142). Although wandering within the state, in this case identified with the city, the narrator is not a part of the social structure. By virtue of his position outside the community, he is doomed to always move like the “Wandering Jew” (142). He is disconnected also from systems, such as property rights, that are arbitrarily based on one’s status as a citizen of a state. The narrator continues to ask the question, “Why is not a single one of these homes mine?” (140), emphasizing the manner in which these social structures are accessible only to members of the assumed community. When the narrator asks a housewife, “If you have no proof [that it is your home], that means it’s alright to think of it as mine, doesn’t it?” her face “became a wall and she closed the window” (Abe *Akai mayu* 141). The narrator’s lack of connection to these systems means that he is automatically excluded by members of the community. It rejects him and forces him to remain isolated and move constantly.

² All translations of *Akai mayu* are my own.

When the narrator finds a thread attached to his foot, he feels an overwhelming desire to pull it and cannot stop even when he realizes that he himself is unraveling. As he continues to pull on the thread, he becomes immobile, “unable to walk even one step more” (Abe *Akai mayu* 143). Finally, the thread forms a cocoon around him. He, however, has disappeared:

Ah, finally with this I can rest. The setting sun stains the cocoon red.

This alone is my home that no one can interfere with. But, even though I now have a home, now there is no me to return to it. (143-4)

In the end, a passerby picks up the hollow cocoon near a train crossing and tosses it into a child’s toy box. Like “Dendrocacalia,” the protagonist’s transformation is connected with suicide, with Common reading Canto XIII of Dante’s *Inferno* in which sinners who killed themselves are turned into trees, and “The Red Cocoon” narrator having possibly thrown himself in front of a train. For Abe, immobile existence, though providing the possibility of comfort and connection with other people, comes at the loss of one’s very humanity. Being a member of modern society in Abe’s works is to become little more than an inanimate object or to be as impotent as a plant or as useless as a child’s toy. The choice that he presents is between perpetual and fluid isolation, and a dehumanized stability that is delineated and striated by infinite ideological boundaries.

Abe Kōbō directly links subjectification by the community, particularly by the state, with a rooted form of existence. Unable to resist, individuals submit themselves to a dehumanizing, structured life as the subject of a communal whole. Abe saw community membership and adherence to its ideologies as an entirely

external and imagined form of subjectification that binds one to a perceived homeland, providing stability at the expense of personal volition. The only other option, however, is to be swept along outside the borders of the social structure.

I propose to define the main body of Abe's work as the search for a liminal subject that not only can navigate between the striations of territorialized ideological existence, but also one that can survive and perhaps even be happy there. In his early pieces, such as "Dendrocacalia" and "The Red Cocoon," this kind of subjectivity is not possible, and both Common and the nameless narrator end up dehumanized and immobile. As his work develops, however, there are hints that this kind of existence is a possibility. Abe himself refers to this mode of thinking as "rootless." In his essay "Rootless Grass Literature" (Jpn: *Ne nashi kusa no bungaku*)³, Abe discusses the manufactured quality of national identity and the state itself:

I recently read an opinion that the idea of the state (*kokka*) did not originally exist in Japan but that it was rapidly created after the Meiji Period. It was very much a one-sided political creation, though, and so what was formed did not arise from within. (Abe *Ne nashi* 349-50)

He goes on to ask:

Why is it so terrifying not to have the concept of a state? The fact that there would be something frightening about having gone without forming a new idea of the state indicates that somewhere there is an assumption that the idea of the state is necessarily *a priori*. My idea of

³ All translations of *Ne nashi kusa no bungaku* are my own.

rootless grass is, in a word, the questioning of this way of thinking.
(350).

For Abe, the idea of the community is a double-edged sword that binds individuals together, but also “creates enemies, includes the function of excluding something, and, through the strengthening of this exclusion, solidifies its interior” (350). This means of community-formation necessitates the expulsion of individuals who somehow do not belong, either through perceived differences or resistance to the social order.

In order to examine Abe’s conception and problematization of the homeland as a method of subjectification, I will utilize Deleuze and Guattari’s analysis of the Oedipal theory of ego formation that they outline in their book *Anti-Oedipus*. For Deleuze and Guattari, the idea of Oedipus is a way to formulate a unified and definable individual ego. Subjects and their relations to each other are reduced to the Oedipal sign:

The social field, where everyone acts and is acted upon (*patit*) as a collective agent of enunciation, an agent of production and antiproduction, is reduced to Oedipus, where everyone now finds himself cornered and cut along the line that divides him into an individual subject of the statement and an individual subject of enunciation. (Deleuze and Guattari *Anti-Oedipus* 265)

For Abe, it is not the Oedipal but the national myth that reduces the individual to a “little triangulated microcosm” (266). Identity based on a national ideal is coded and measurable. Like Oedipus, the imagined community of the nation-state is a

stabilizing structure into which the individual can be easily fitted. The idyllic visions of cherry blossoms and nature that represent Japaneseness indicate:

[T]he reign of images is the new way in which capitalism utilizes the schizzes and diverts the flows: composite images, images flattened onto other images, so that when this operation reaches its outcome the little ego of each person, related to its father-mother, is truly the center of the world. (265)

While Deleuze and Guattari refer to capitalism specifically, Abe's concern is more generally the modern nation-state that traps and combines fragmented visions and turns them into a supposed national experience.

In addition to their conception of the Oedipal theory, I will also use Deleuze and Guattari's idea of nomadic space, primarily as described in their work *A Thousand Plateaus*, to examine how Abe imagines the space between borders that is not walled off by the social field. Nomadic thought offers both Abe and Deleuze and Guattari ways of visualizing subjectivity outside and beyond the coded realm of the socius. Abe's rootless grass speaks to a nomadic existence that does not need to remain rooted to a single territory or idea. He characterizes the difference between settled and nomadic people:

"[The nomads] occupied a place, but they did not make boundaries. They left the broken border as it was. The real horizon appeared to them to move infinitely far away. The nomads," he suggested, "offered a horizon that stretched without boundaries for settled people, who believed that national borders stretched to the end of the world. ...

Settled people, who believed that space exists and that time flows according to particular rules, found only within national borders, now discovered that the same time flows outside space.” (qtd. in Shields 57)

In Deleuze and Guattari, nomadic territory is what lies outside the social field that striates space and restricts flows. For them as well as for Abe, nomads are a counterexample to the perceived necessity of settled stability that dominates nation-state formation, which operates with a central state organ that territorializes and controls the space around it. Abe sees development into the nation-state as a false tautology and questions whether it is, in fact, necessary for a society to maintain a state formation.

There must be, then, another mode of subjectivity that can refuse the state codes and all the formation of a new kind of individual that will not “long nostalgically for the ‘fixed, fast-frozen relationships’ of the real or fantasized past, [but be able] to delight in mobility, to thrive on renewal, to look forward to future developments in their conditions of life and their relations with their fellow men” (Berman 96). Deleuze and Guattari’s schizophrenic model of subjectivity provides a possibility for this sort of individuation. The schizophrenic self is one who “has at his disposal his very own recording code, which does not coincide with the social code, or coincides with it only in order to parody it.” This means that “the schizophrenic passes from one code to the other, that he deliberately *scrambles all the codes*” (D&G *Anti-Oedipus* 15). The schizophrenic is the liminal subject that is able to move between the coded boundaries of the social group in order to generate

its own path. In the whirlwind of modern existence, it offers a possible model for a new mode of existence that can enter the perpetual flow of non-sedentary life, but, rather than drowning, will actually feel at home in it and perhaps could even use it to generate new creations.

Abe's primary concern is the relationship between individual and community, as well as the manner in which, even though modernity has changed modes of living and thinking, modern community formations, such as the nation-state, force individuals to remain grounded in an antiquated belief that a total identity based on rooted and centered nationality is possible. In addition, interactions between individual and group are one-sided as the individual cannot choose to exist outside the communal sets but is, instead, at the mercy of the state authority. Rootless grass is Abe's way of articulating a new relationship between the individual and the community that does not maintain an a priori vision of identity based on an ideal community. Totalizing and transcendent symbols of the whole, such as the Oedipal homeland, operate by removing individual identity from subjects and covering the resultant void of self with a veneer of stability in the form of communal belonging.

Abe's experiences in Japan-occupied Manchuria showed him the emptiness of this forced national identity in three main ways. First, he realized how Japaneseness was deeply based on geographical experiences limited to people in Japan. Abe had little real experience in his youth of transcendental signifiers of Japanese identity, such as the cherry blossom and natural beauty. Second, he witnessed the contradiction between ideological ideal and reality. Japanese imperial identity, supposedly given to all subject of the empire, was merely an imaginary idea. The

reality was a harsh distinction between those who were of Japanese nationality and those who were not. Finally, as Japan lost the war, Abe saw the way in which the security of communal belonging is based entirely on the power of the structure itself. That is, once Japan no longer held military or political power, Japanese identity provided no assurance of support or safety. Identity based on the idea of nationality is entirely external and ceases to exist if that nation does not continue.

In the following chapters, using three of his novels, I will examine the themes with which Abe set out his works, demonstrating that he continued to explore the question of movement between social borders that seek to restrict the flows of existence. In his 1957 novel, *Beasts Head for Home* (Jpn: *Kemonotachi wa kokyō wo mezasu*), these borders are the national boundaries that cordon off identity, distributing it to those who are seen to belong, but are based only on the political and military situation at the time. It is up to who holds the territorializing power to decide the identity of the individual. As the novel shows, this identity is wholly reliant on the guarantee of the state and, once that is gone, individual subjectivity is all but ignored. Space between ideological territories is a hazardous wasteland where identity cannot exist. Instead, there is a need for a totalizing ideal of the homeland to provide a framework for constructing the subject.

Abe's 1962 novel, *The Woman in the Dunes*, further articulates the manner in which the modern state striates its territory in order to resist the chaotic other. Ideology ties the subject to the community and provides an idealized identity that centers on personal achievement that would then further the group. This section will particularly use Michel Foucault's analysis of the methods that modern societies

use to control and individuate subjects. The village in *The Woman in the Dunes* predicts many aspects of modern social control and production that Foucault outlines in his book *Discipline & Punish*. In particular are the ways in which this society atomizes the individuals within it, keeping them isolated and fully contained. It uses a Panopticon-like system of observation and discipline to create docile subjects who will work to maintain the stable coherence of the group. Foucault also illustrates how the ideology of a powerful individual is merely a disseminated ideal, with the reality being that the group flattens and normalizes all individuals, reducing them to tools of the state. Relationships are fragmented and existence is atomized so that family units are literally cut off from each other by sand dunes. The village's Sisyphean work of walling off and shoveling away the flowing sands provides a literal metaphor for the way that communities struggle to stabilize existence, rooting it in a territorialized space and disallowing any hope of living outside its boundaries. Power systems reduce and homogenize the individuality of the subject, forcing it to exist only as a part with a fixed role. The endless project of perpetuating the village's borders means taking from the individual only what is needed and discarding the rest.

Finally, in *The Ruined Map*, written in 1967, the relationship between individual and community has changed. The state as an ideological power has withdrawn to the periphery. The novel's labyrinthine city undergoes a project like the village in the dunes, but, this time, it is a Faustian project of development that means it is always expanding and always changing. The flux has moved inside the borders. The city of *The Ruined Map* is an image of the turmoil and cacophony of

modernity. It no longer maintains its unity through opposition to the outside because there is no more outside since it is forever expanding and consuming what is around it. The individual, however, has not changed. Unable to adapt to the chaos of this project, individual relationships have become almost impossible. The subject still desires to be rooted, however. Abe uses the metaphor of the map to express how the individual tries to fix his or her coordinates in a stable representation of life. The narrator's search for a woman's missing husband – someone who has disappeared from the map's territory – relies on discerning and decrypting signs that, like the legend on a map, we assume to be rooted in reality. But there is no meaning behind these signs. As the narrator loses his place on the map, he becomes disconnected from the socius, losing his identity in the process, since it was based on nothing more than his connection to the community.

Abe's articulation of the modern experience became more sophisticated throughout his life. His central concern, however, remains the impossibility for the individual subject to move outside or between the borders that define belonging to a community and the social structures that provide a sense of coherence and permanence to everyone who is a part of them. The chaotic flood of modernity overwhelms existence as an individual if it is removed from the coded and controlled flows of the community structure. Subjectivity remains rooted in the concept of the national formation, regardless of the inability of that ideal to reconcile itself with the reality of an ever-changing world of becoming. Abe believed that this mode of subjectivity is dependent on outdated modes of understanding the world, and he felt that too much reliance on these past ways of thinking was a

mistake. Rather than codified traditions and pre-existing axioms, Abe wanted to understand “the inconsistent conflicts of the processes in the modern consciousness” (Abe *Dentou ni tsuite* 45)⁴. Instead of trying to build a crystal palace over these inconsistencies as many state structures did, Abe sought a new way of thinking about the relationship between the individual and group that rejected the Oedipal myth of the homeland and allowed for a more open and creative existence.

⁴ All translations of *Dentou ni tsuite* are my own.

CHAPTER 2

BEASTS HEAD FOR HOME

Beasts Head for Home, set in Manchuria, takes place two years after the end of World War II, during the Chinese Civil War. Hisaki Kyuzo is a Japanese boy raised in the Japan-occupied Manchurian town of Baharin, only to be taken in by Alexandrof, a mild Soviet lieutenant, when he is abandoned by the fleeing Japanese military. Kyuzo attempts to cross the Manchurian plains with a Chinese drug runner named Ko in order to return to Japan, a place Kyuzo has never been. He is unsuccessful and the novel ends with Kyuzo trapped in a smuggling boat off the coast of Japan, beating his fists bloody like an animal on the inside of the hull.

Beasts Head for Home concerns itself with the manner in which individual identity is rooted in an essentialized notion of communal membership. Kyuzo identifies himself as Japanese, an idea based on images of a homeland that he has never experienced in person but rather knows through the imperial education:

What he knew about Japan was only that which he could imagine from his textbooks – (Mount Fuji, Three Views of Japan, surrounded by the ocean, the green smiles of islands...the soft breeze, small birds calling, fish swimming...leaves falling in the forest when autumn arrives, the sparkling sun afterwards, and the coloring of red berries...a diligent land, industrious people...). (Abe *Kemonotachi* 27-8)⁵

⁵ All translations of *Kemonotachi Wa Kokyō wo Mezasu* are my own.

For Kyuzo, these fragments are a Platonic vision of what it means to be Japanese as defined and disseminated through the state apparatuses. His need to return to a Japanese homeland is not due to any first-hand experience or concrete connection, but rather is related to the manner in which his identity is tied up in an ideal that is not reconcilable with the world around him. When he meets Ōkane, a member of a gang of Japanese smugglers, Kyuzo asks about the state of Japan. After Ōkane tells him, “in a word, it’s a burnt field”, Kyuzo asks, “and the cherry trees, I suppose they’re burnt as well”. When Ōkane mocks him, Kyuzo defends himself saying, “I’ve never seen a cherry tree” (216-7). His concern is not for the people of Japan, whom he has no conscious connection to, but rather for those images that he thinks of as transcendental signifiers that form an Oedipal root of Japanese identity.

Throughout the novel, Abe shows the ambiguity of national identity. Despite his faith in the Japanese ideal, Kyuzo’s own status as a Japanese citizen comes into question from the beginning. Although both his parents are from Japan, their backgrounds, particularly that of his father’s side, are unknown. When his father dies, his mother’s decision to stay in Manchuria is largely because she “didn’t have a home to return to in Japan” (Abe *Kemonotachi* 28). Kyuzo does not have any familial ties to his perceived homeland. He lacks one very important aspect of national identity, which is the ability to trace historically and genealogically one’s line back into the history of the nation. His mother pushes Kyuzo to apply to a Japanese industrial school in Harbin. For her, “in order to break free from a social status of unknown lineage, [Kyuzo] was a soldier of hope” (33). By integrating him more fully into the Japanese ideological community through its education and colonial systems,

Kyuzo's mother hopes to erase any question of the family's national identity as Japanese citizens.

Kyuzo's need for communal belonging results in his continual misrecognition of other people as Japanese. He tries to identify Japanese nationality through physical features and being able to speak Japanese, inadvertently participating in a system of community formation based on a shared appearance and language. He describes the Mongols who accompany the Soviets as "having faces that were the same as Japanese" (Abe *Kemonotachi* 35), although he later admits to Ko that he cannot distinguish particularly well whether someone is Japanese, Chinese, Korean, or Taiwanese (80). He mistakes a Korean officer for Japanese when he speaks to him in Japanese, although the man is a member of the 8th Route Army. He also initially thinks that Ko is Japanese due to his ability to read and speak the language.

Kyuzo's conception of himself as an individual is linked entirely with membership to a group, in this case that of the Japanese nation. The formation of that identity, however, is based on "notions of culture that marked groups off from one another in essential ways, uniting language, race, geography, and history in a single concept" (Dirks 58). Like all nations, the idea of Japan as a coherent totality is artificial. Kyuzo's attempts at connecting to the people he meets all center on aspects of this imagined community that have been presented to him as inherent qualities of anyone who belongs. He assumes that Japanese people have definable and unique physical characteristics, and that the ability to speak the Japanese language indicates that they are also Japanese citizens. Most importantly, Kyuzo

believes that having Japan as an original homeland links all Japanese people together as members of a single, ideal community.

In contrast to Kyuzo, Ko represents the ambiguity and liminal nature of identity, particularly that based on national communities. As a drug dealer, he operates between established boundaries, so much so that his own name is somewhat unclear. He initially introduces himself as Wang Muzheng but later tells Kyuzo not to call him anything before finally saying that his name is Ko. Like Kyuzo, his lineage is uncertain. He claims that his mother was Japanese, that his grandfather was Korean, and that before that he does not know (Abe *Kemonotachi* 50, 81). He almost mocks Kyuzo's inability to clearly see of what nationality he is, but also asks "where the heck did I even come from? I inadvertently think about that kind of thing" (79), and talks about nationality as though it were a disguise he can take off and put on at will. He demonstrates that he can speak a variety of languages, allowing him to move between boundaries and national groups more easily. He tells Kyuzo, "when I become Japanese, I can't blow my nose with my fingers, when I become Korean, I have to pull out my beard with tweezers...but either way isn't a big deal" (80). Contrary to Kyuzo's essentialized national identity, Ko's version of nationality is based on shifting one's behavior and language.

Unlike Ko, Kyuzo is unable to operate while disconnected from any kind of social field. Kyuzo acknowledges that he and Ko are "people of entirely different worlds" (Abe 1996 86). Kyuzo's subjectivity is such that it requires a stable center, that of the imagined hometown. The ideal of Japaneseness is how he defines himself and his existence. Before the war, Baharin acted as a surrogate of Japan. Ideological

systems of education and imperial unity assured Kyuzo of his place within the community. It is a mode of existence that allows identity to be rooted within both the concept of a home and through the continuation of a stable consciousness:

As today exists in yesterday, tomorrow is in today, as today exists in tomorrow, yesterday lives on in today. He had been taught that kind of human life and he too had come to believe in it. (27)

Life within the *socius* includes a sense of wholeness and permanence. Kyuzo felt connected not only to the other citizens, but there was also a kind of homogenization of time that enables him to root himself in the past. The human life he has been taught and believes in is one in which there is a promise of order and stability firmly based on cause and effect.

Of course, Japan's defeat disrupts this stability: "With the war's result, however, that promise had disintegrated into scattered pieces with no relationship between them. For the Kyuzo of now, yesterday and tomorrow no longer had any sort of connection" (Abe *Kemonotachi* 27). The dissolution of the social structure leaves Kyuzo adrift both in the literal sense that he is later lost on the Manchurian plains, but also in the socio-psychological sense that his subjectivity is no longer attached to any sort of community. His desire to return to Japan is a reflection of his need to remain rooted to that imagined ideal of national identity. The nature of war, particularly for those on the losing side, makes systems of existence collapse and recognition by others of subjectivity fade. Rights and relationships that Kyuzo believed were permanent quickly show themselves to be dependent on the strength of the community that promises them. Likewise, it becomes clear that identity and

belonging can be cast off. When the Soviets are approaching Baharin, a soldier is seen removing his uniform and burying it, as though shedding his Japanese identity along with it. The head of the factory tells people, “Everyone, wear a red ribbon on your chest. The Ruskies like red” (30). In extreme circumstances, belonging or connection to social groups becomes like an article of clothing you can change at will.

Kyuzo is initially relieved at this dissolution. When the town is deserted and he sees the “fragments of a former life, which it seemed he couldn’t even remember”, he experiences “an oddly sweet feeling of release” (Abe *Kemonotachi* 32) from the pressures that his mother had placed on him. At first, he feels that he has been freed from a restrictive system of social discipline and control. It soon becomes clear, however, that Kyuzo is unable to adapt to this freedom. When he is living with the Soviets, he does not have the sense of direction that he did within the Japanese community. He is situated in a relatively comfortable and safe environment but is unable to fully accept that existence. When he sleeps, he has “dreams where he became a bug wandering on top of a map, or where he was on a train that had no destination without a ticket” (26). These images are of purposeless movement. Although Kyuzo at some level resented the restrictions the Japanese system placed on him, without his connection to that system, he feels a lack of direction.

Soon after beginning his movement through the Manchurian wasteland, Kyuzo imagines a more comfortable existence:

A town with a warm flame burning, a bed where you can sleep
without thinking about anything, outside the house a garden, outside
the garden a road, and then after that nothing at all, where things like

this lifeless wasteland become only an amusing story, where if something is funny you laugh and if you're bored you can quietly close your eyes leaning back in a chair, where boys and girls live who know that all actions have meaning.... (85)

Beyond the simple desire to escape from a dangerous situation, Kyuzo's dream is very specifically of an immediate and small existence. His ideal world is a completely centered and almost immobile life that is easily charted and understood, and where all actions signify coded and comprehensible meanings. It is a rooted existence that distills his desire for a homeland into a single image of an idyllic town that he can grasp. It has a clearly delineated border that separates the inside from the unknowable nothingness outside. Anything beyond the road is simply the chaotic void of the other.

The Manchurian plains, then, are exactly that void. They are the purely smooth space that the state has no claim to:

Around them was a single surface, a vast steppe closed in by snow and ice that stretched as far as they could see. No matter how much you walked, one hour, ten hours, not a single change occurred in the scenery. (Abe *Kemonotachi* 51)

In this space, civilization and human community do not exist. It is the seemingly endless blankness that signifies what the socius tries to exclude via its borders. If the world Kyuzo desires is small and measurable, the plains are infinite, with absolutely no possibility of reference. Kyuzo imagines: "in his mind a white map spread out, and on it a single, isolated dot appeared. How tiny it is. Too small, he

thought, and tried to look closer but just by approaching it the dot fled and wouldn't get any bigger" (97). A map's existence is possible only where there is some kind of ideological power that can territorialize and represent a space. Lines and borders are measured and delineated in order to help locate the individual within a system of understanding, such as that of the state:

After all, it was the maps that *conjured up* borders where none had existed ...; the maps that *summoned* unity from chaos ...; the maps that *enrobed* the shapeless ...; that is, the *maps* that endowed with form what from the beginning had been no more than a dream. (Wood 33)

Kyuzo's image of a blank white map, then, points to the fact that the plains are not part of any kind of state or communal totality. The unity that he experienced in Baharin has been replaced by the chaos that state ideology tries to control.

The plains lie between ideological and state borders. They are the liminal space that is not under the sovereignty of any power, such as that of the Nationalists or the Communists in the Chinese Civil War. As such, they represent a far greater danger than any territorialized area. Ko tells Kyuzo: "Here is still the border between enemy and ally. To my mind, the most dangerous place is the border. It's even more dangerous than right in the middle of the enemy" (Abe *Kemonotachi* 78). The space between is a completely uncoded territory, without cultural systems of meaning. Kyuzo's subjectivity becomes a miniscule dot, completely isolated. Kyuzo's earlier fantasy is of a town so small that it can be mapped as having only a house, a garden, and a road, with Kyuzo stuck at the very center. The white map, then, offers

the opposite: it is an impossibly vast and smooth space with a decentered and ever-moving subject.

After almost starving to death, Kyuzo and Ko manage to reach a town. Ko betrays Kyuzo and steals the passport Alexandrov gave him to safely go through Communist-controlled areas. Kyuzo finally reaches a Japanese settlement that remains in a coastal city: “a block of company-owned houses, fenced by a barbed wire covered wall. A mere ten almost identical buildings were lined up. The gates facing the street were all firmly closed off with stacked railroad ties, and within the alley, only one communal door was open” (Abe *Kemonotachi* 202). Here is the small and firmly walled off town that Kyuzo has been chasing after. It acts as a microcosm of Japan itself, maintaining a strict boundary between its interior and exterior, as well as restricting the flows of movement within. Up to this point, Kyuzo has continued to hold onto his conception of nationality both as something that links him to other Japanese and as an inherent quality that he holds within him. When he tries to enter the compound, however, he is denied because he does not have any identification papers. Kyuzo pleads with the guard who tells him, “Really, there’s nothing I can do ... things are different than how they used to be” (204). This statement points to the very nature of communal belonging and national identity. It brings into focus the primary existential questions of *Beasts Head for Home*: does the individual exist outside any community that can provide an identity to him or her? Is it possible to be a liminal subjectivity that does not fall under the auspices of a certain social field?

In other words, the rights to stability and recognition as a person that Kyuzo assumes are due to some connection to Japaneseness are rather only possible when Japan maintains power as a state. If that power disappears, as it did at the end of World War II, those rights and privileges vanish with it. The guard tells Kyuzo, “lots of kids your age have died, you know...We don’t even know what tomorrow will be like...even if you think it’s unfortunate, we don’t have any power. I know it seems like I’m saying cruel things but...” (Abe *Kemonotachi* 204). The essential community that Kyuzo has believed in reveals itself to be simply an artificial ideal. That he identifies himself as Japanese provides him with no special rights or privileges or connection with other Japanese. Rather, it is the social structure that, when intact, creates the illusion of natural rights as a subject. Kyuzo cannot break himself free from an identity rooted in imagined ideals. Consequently, when those ideals no longer carry any puissance, he finds himself drifting between borders of belonging without a way of existing as an independent self.

The only borders that Kyuzo is able to cross are those created by groups that have political or military power in that area, such as the Communists and the Nationalists. The boundaries of Japan are closed to him, and thus his goal of a Japanese homeland is an ever-receding and always distant ideal. Without a passport, he cannot breach the walls of the compound. When he is chased from the Japanese compound, Kyuzo becomes reminiscent of the homeless narrator of *The Red Cocoon*:

Dusk was approaching...where should he go? ...He had been entirely discarded...he had a forlorn feeling like when, in junior high, he had been late and wasn’t allowed into the classroom. More than that, there

were houses everywhere. Where there's a house there is certainly a door, and where there's a door it is certainly locked fast. The door was right there, but the interior was impossibly far. Ultimately, was this any different from the wasteland devoid of anyone at all? (Abe *Kemonotachi* 206)

In this instant, the walls are not only physical but also ideological because his access to them is barred by the simple lack of a passport. As far as the guard is concerned, Kyuzo's status as an individual is of no consequence. That is, without the external link to a political system via a passport, Kyuzo has no connection to the Japanese nation.

As if a premonition, before he arrives at the compound Kyuzo has a dream: He dreamt of the Sea of Japan. The sea was no wider than a small river. On the opposite shore there were mountains, and in the folds of those mountains he could see a town. The town looked identical to Baharin that had drove him out and deserted him. It was even as though Baharin had moved there exactly as it was. If the sea were this narrow, perhaps even that kind of thing was possible. His chest throbbed with the desire to finally arrive where he was going. But the distance was just a little too far to jump. (Abe *Kemonotachi* 194)

The homeland is always out of reach because it does not exist. Kyuzo's obsession with that ideal dooms him from the start. In the end, even he begins to understand that what he has been searching for is impossible:

Dammit, it was as though I had been running around in circles in the same place...No matter how far I went, I couldn't take even one step out from the wasteland...Perhaps what I called Japan didn't exist anywhere...When I walked, the plains stepped along with me. Japan kept escaping from me. (242)

Too late, Kyuzo starts to realize that the homeland is an illusion and that, while he has left the physical space of the Manchurian plains, ideologically he is still simply a miniscule dot surrounded by blank, white nothingness. Through his belief in an imagined connection to an ideal homeland, Kyuzo finds himself closed off from anywhere that he might call home. He attempts to define himself via an essential notion of being Japanese, but that system of individualization collapses with the end of the war, leaving him with a void at the center of his identity.

Before Kyuzo leaves Baharin, he hears a Soviet officer say, "People who have a place to return to can't endure not returning. It's instinct" (Abe *Kemonotachi* 11). If *Beasts Head for Home* is an early experiment in the search for a liminal subject, it is not a particularly optimistic one. Existence between boundaries is impossible. Kyuzo's subjectivity cannot survive in the chaotic void that is the uncoded, smooth space of the Manchurian wasteland. His sense of self and identity are too external. They are too much a product of an ideological project of colonial nationality. Once the structure that guaranteed stability crumbles, Kyuzo is unable to stand alone. Nor is he able to seek out a new home. In other words, it is not the need to define oneself via participation in a community that is at the heart of Kyuzo's misery. Rather, it is the belief in an a priori identity as a citizen of a nation-state that is rooted in an

external homeland. National identity, by its very nature, is placed on the individual. Even in those instances when the individual may choose to change nationalities, there is never the option to withdraw totally from belonging to a nation-state.

When the smugglers take Kyuzo onto their boat, he thinks they are planning to help him. When Kyuzo realizes that he is being forced to remain onboard, he tries to demand that they let him return to Japan. Ōkane sarcastically replies, “What are you talking about? Right here is a splendid Japan. ... It’s better to be here than going on land and becoming a young vagrant” (Abe *Kemonotachi* 238-9). Initially, Kyuzo’s treatment at the hands of the smugglers appears to be cruel and malicious. Ōkane’s statement, however, transforms the boat and its community into a miniature model of Japan. There is little difference between what the group of smugglers does and what Japan does as a nation-state. In both cases, the individual is forced into a membership that provides a role and a place within the structure. The only distinction is that the smugglers are far more overt in their methods of power. In this instance, Japan as a physical space becomes like the Manchurian plains. In all likelihood, were Kyuzo to have successfully arrived in Japan, he would have received no better treatment than he did at the Japanese compound. He has no familial or other connections to anyone there. He would have been still stuck on the outside, forced to wander in danger of starvation just as he had in Manchuria. Japan as a homeland would remain always receding into the distance.

The choice that Kyuzo makes in the beginning to board a train in the hopes of returning to Japan sets his fate. The existence he dreams of resembles in many ways his life in Baharin with Alexandrov. He is unable to accept it fully, however, because

he cannot fully let go of the idea that he is Japanese, as though Japaneseness were an irreducible and inseparable quality. Like Abe himself, Kyuzo experiences the state's efforts to provide a totalizing national myth that links all Japanese citizens through an artifice of national identity. He cannot become a liminal subject because he does not and cannot believe in an autonomous subjectivity that might exist outside the codes of the nation-state.

CHAPTER 3

THE WOMAN IN THE DUNES

In *The Woman in the Dunes*, Abe's tenth novel, the protagonist, Niki Jumpei, travels alone from the city to the coast on an amateur entomology trip. There, he discovers a decrepit village that consists of isolated houses sunk deep into the sand dunes. The villagers capture him in order to help with the Sisyphean task of keeping the sand from wiping out the remaining homes. He at first tries several times to escape, and is almost successful. In the end, though, he appears to accept and perhaps even find value in his life in the village community. The novel closes with a police report that he has been declared officially missing after seven years, suggesting that, although having gained the ability to leave, he has decided to stay.

Jumpei's movement from the city to imprisonment in the coastal village performs two important tasks. First, in much the same way as Kyuzo's experiences outside familiar ideological borders, the movement forces Jumpei to realize that his identity as a member of a community and the rights and privileges that he enjoys are dependent upon his existence in that social group. When he initially realizes that he has been captured, Jumpei's arguments are based upon his connection to social systems that do not exist within the context of the village:

Was it permissible to snare, exactly like a mouse or an insect, a man who had his certificate of medical insurance, someone who had paid

his taxes, who was employed, and whose family records were in order?

(Abe *Woman* 51)

Jumpei frames his own identity via his integration into state bureaucracies, which he feels ensures certain protections as an individual. His disbelief stems not from the assumption that the villagers would dare capture someone, but rather from the fact that they would capture someone who is already a subject of a social field. Like Kyuzo, he is unable at first to understand that these definitions of identity are relative and do not exist outside that field's territory.

Jumpei feels that because he "lived under a constitutional government ... it was natural that he should expect help" (Abe *Woman* 96). He continues to threaten the villagers with reprisal by the authorities that are representative of that government. Jumpei trusts the value of an identity that is provided and promised by state structures. Unlike Kyuzo, Jumpei's conception of identity is not based on the notion of nationalism. Instead, it is a generalized belief that his individual subjectivity somehow deserves respect and consideration even outside the social network that initially creates it. That is, for Jumpei, the rights that he has as a citizen of the state or city are actually basic human rights. His movement to the village makes clear that this is not the case. The protections of the state and the importance of the individual are illusions.

In addition to illustrating the artificial nature of identity, the second aspect of the apparent contrast between the city and the village suggests an inherent contrast or distinction between these two types of existence. Jumpei believes not only that his identity should protect him from imprisonment, but also that his life in the city

was more valuable and meaningful than existence in the village. When he first begins to understand that the woman's life is devoted to removing the sand that constantly threatens to flood the hole and crush her home in it, he becomes exasperated:

"But this means you exist only for the purpose of clearing away the sand, doesn't it?"

"Yes, but we just can't sneak away at night, you know."

He was more and more upset. He had no intention of becoming involved in such a life.

"Yes, you can. It would be simple, wouldn't it? You can do anything if you want to."

"No, that wouldn't be right at all. [...] The village keeps going because we never let up clearing away the sand like this."

[.....]

Suddenly a feeling of anger welled up in [Jumpei]. He was angry at the things that bound the woman...and at the woman who let herself be bound. (Abe *Woman* 39-40)

Jumpei sees life in the village as endless labor without meaning. He is the product of a modern ideology that emphasizes the freedom and capabilities of the individual. He argues with the villagers that this kind of life is a restriction of his potential as a person: "Even a monkey could shovel up the sand if it just had a little practice. I should be able to do a lot more than that. A man has the obligation to make full use of the abilities he has" (152). Life at the bottom of the hole is not repulsive to Jumpei

merely because he has been forced into it. He also feels that the very existence of the villagers is limited and meaningless. He is dismayed by the idea that he “had doubtless already been entered into the register alongside many others as a mere cog in the working of their everyday life” (117).

Abe’s use of this kind of extreme setting helps to emphasize a seemingly irreconcilable distinction between life in the village and existence in the city. Jumpei’s initial resistance to remaining in the village is based on his perception that his life in the city was more free and, more importantly, meaningful. Before Jumpei realizes that he has been captured, the woman hints that he will be staying. Jumpei responds that he will only be there one night and that “[he does not] lead a life of leisure” (*Abo Woman* 34). He sees the woman’s efforts as a kind of curious but ultimately trivial act. His own life in the city is, he believes, far more important. Jumpei’s position is that the state, in the form of the city, is the peak of meaningful existence. He views the woman’s condition as being similarly imprisoned, telling her: “You’re as much the victim as I am, aren’t you? ... Nobody has the right to keep you shut up here” (60). It is inconceivable to Jumpei that anyone would choose to remain in this kind of existence.

Despite the sharp contrast between the village and the city, however, it quickly becomes clear that the two are reflections of each other. Like the ship in *Beasts Head for Home*, the village acts as a stripped-down microcosm of modern communal life. There is, in fact, little difference in individual existence from the city to the village. Although Jumpei feels that his life has more importance in the city,

when he reflects on his job as a teacher, it appears just as Sisyphean as shoveling sand:

Year after year students tumble along like the waters of a river. They flow away, and only the teacher is left behind, like some deeply buried rock at the bottom of the current. Although he may tell others of his hopes, he doesn't dream of them himself. He thinks of himself as worthless and either falls into masochistic loneliness or, failing that, ultimately becomes suspicious and pious, forever denouncing the eccentricities of others. He longs so much for freedom and action that he can only hate people. (Abe *Woman* 80)

Although he wants to escape from the village and its seemingly meaningless struggle, his existence in the city is just as empty. He uses entomology as a way of attempting to individuate himself as the discoverer of a new species of insect: "When [an entomologist discovers a new species], the discoverer's name appears in the illustrated encyclopedias of entomology appended to the technical Latin name of the newly found insect; and there, perhaps, it is preserved for something less than eternity" (10). Jumpei thinks that there is more substance to his existence than in that of the villagers. Contradictorily, he still uses an esoteric hobby as a means to escape his own life.

After Jumpei fails to escape from the pit, he carries on a conversation with an invisible voice. Jumpei insists that he has "more of a reason for existence" than simply helping the village survive. The voice, acting as a kind of arbiter, replies to him: "I hear there are people in the world who, over a period of ten years, have

calculated the value of pi to several hundred decimal places. All right, I suppose they have that much reason for existence. But you took the trouble of coming to such a place as this precisely because you rejected such a reason for existence" (Abe *Woman* 219). The voice, as a part of Jumpei's emerging self-doubt, recognizes that absorbing oneself in things like memorizing pi or entomology are means of trying to somehow ignore or otherwise block off realization of the emptiness of one's life within the social field. Jumpei's insect collecting is a way to leave the restrictive confines and boundaries of his normal existence. He is so much dissatisfied with his life in the city that he purposely teases his coworkers about his vacation in order to upset their "daily gray routine". He even feels "an unbearable self-aversion with the thought that among the glum and gray, people other than he had colors other than gray – red, blue, green" (97). The trip is an attempt at creating some kind of individuality to set himself apart from his colleagues.

There is, then, a stark contrast between Jumpei's belief in an idea of individual freedom and potential and the reality that he has experienced. Although he is unwilling to consciously accept this, there are clear signs that he is somehow aware of it. He recalls a conversation with a coworker whom everyone has nicknamed the Mobius man due to a lack of distinction between his union and private lives. Jumpei tells him: "I have considerable doubt about a system of education that imputes meaning to life. ... In other words, an illusory education that makes one believe that something is when it really isn't" (Abe *Woman* 98). Jumpei is also a product of this educational system that, as an apparatus of the state, disseminates the belief that life within the social field has intrinsic value. This value

is what Jumpei feels is being removed by his captivity within the sand dunes. His identity is based upon this notion that life within the city is worthwhile and meaningful, and yet he appears to understand that these values are illusion:

It only happened in novels or movies that summer was filled with dazzling sun. What existed in reality were humble, small-town Sundays ... and then, at the end, a jam-packed trolley rickety with fatigue. Everyone knows this is fact, but no one wants to make a fool of himself and be taken in; so, on the gray canvas of reality, he zestfully sketches the mere form of this illusory festival. (97-8)

Rather than a fundamentally different existence, the village is instead a reflection of Jumpei's former life with this illusion stripped away. It is a physical representation of the isolated and endlessly repetitive and regulated life that Jumpei led in the city.

The social structure both in the city and in the village is one in which there is an ideological façade that roots the individual within the community. Jumpei sees a placard in the village that reads "LOVE YOUR HOME" (Abe *Woman* 22). The woman repeats this idea, telling Jumpei: "In our village we really follow the motto 'Love Your Home.' ... It's the love you have for where you live" (37-8). It is this ideology that maintains coherence within the village as members are taught to feel a connection with the community. Leading a meaningful life and supporting the social structure act reciprocally to try to ensure the survival of the village. In the city, although the emphasis is on individual potential and use of one's abilities, the educational system instills a sense of value to a normalized existence within the group. One's individual talents must be used in support of the whole. Even within

the village, however, there are homes without a rope ladder, leaving the inhabitants trapped like Jumpei. According to the woman, those with a ladder have lived there for generations, creating a genealogical connection to the location. They remain attached to the sedentary communal existence because of a perceived historical connection.

Despite this ideological message of love for one's home, it is obvious that the societies of both the village and the city operate through methods of discipline and subjugation that foreshadow certain aspects of Foucault's work *Discipline & Punish* ten years later. The literal isolation of the houses, each buried in its own pit, illustrates the atomization of the members of the community. Foucault articulates the manner in which societies, starting in the late 17th century, instigated systems of control by partitioning individuals. Through this separation, the state is able to "[distribute] individuals in a space in which one might isolate them and map them" (Foucault 144). The position, function, and condition of the individual become mapped and entirely knowable:

Each individual has his own place; and each place its individual. Avoid distributions in groups; break up collective dispositions; analyze confused, massive or transient pluralities. Disciplinary space tends to be divided into as many sections as there are bodies or elements to be distributed. One must eliminate the effects of imprecise distributions, the uncontrolled disappearance of individuals, their diffuse circulation, their unusable and dangerous coagulation; it was a tactic of anti-desertion, anti-vagabondage, anti-concentration. Its aim was to

establish presences and absences, to know where and how to locate individuals, to set up useful communications, to interrupt others.... (143).

The distribution of the subjects of the village makes it a simple matter to locate and control or discipline each member individually. As the woman tells Jumpei, “honestly there hasn’t been a single person to get out yet” (Abe *Woman* 120). Escape is virtually impossible due to rigidity with which space is stratified and controlled.

This village projects this control primarily through the Panopticon-like fire tower from which someone is constantly watching. Foucault describes the use of the Panopticon, a central tower surrounded by individual cells isolated from one another and from which an observer who can see without being seen, as a way of maintaining an absolute power over the observed. The unseen gaze of the observer ensures in those being watched “a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power” (Foucault 201). The villagers know that they may be observed at any point and therefore are dissuaded preemptively from trying to escape or cause disorder. Jumpei remarks to himself, “More than iron doors, more than walls, it is the tiny peephole that really makes a prisoner feel locked in” (Abe *Woman* 146). The gaze of the Panopticon subjugates the villagers even more than the physical walls of the sand pits.

There are significant differences between the village and Foucault’s conception of a disciplinary society, however. For example, there is a clear power differentiation between the villagers on the surface and those who live in the pits. When Jumpei misbehaves, such as when he captures the woman to try to pressure

the villagers for his release, they have no issue with simply withholding water until he is forced to submit rather than die. In the end, it is not the “visible and unverifiable power” (Marroum 98) that conquers Jumpei but direct physical punishment by the villagers. They are not interested in targeting his soul as happens in the systems that Foucault describes. They are merely interested in his physical body and the labor that it can perform at the behest of the village. And, by targeting his physical state, they gain control over his body as, when he gives in for water, he returns to shoveling with the woman: “Mechanically he took his place next to the woman and began to shovel” (Abe *Woman* 154).

Despite these differences, Foucault’s analysis of the manner in which disciplinary systems produce and normalize individuals is visible in the social fields of both the village and the city. As Foucault theorizes: “Discipline ‘makes’ individuals; it is the specific technique of a power that regards individuals both as objects and as instruments of its exercise” (Foucault 170). The isolated existence at the bottom of holes in the sand is a literal representation of the atomization of individuals in the city wherein human connections are abstract and difficult. Jumpei’s relationship with his coworkers is vague and almost adversarial. He refers to the woman he had a relationship with simply as “the other woman.” She in turn describes their sexual relationship as being “like buying at a department store.... If you don’t like it, you can take it back any time” (Abe *Woman* 133) and accuses Jumpei of having a “psychological venereal disease” (134). That is, Jumpei is unable to commit to a relationship with another person. His individuation is so total that he lacks the ability to communicate with anyone else.

While subjects are individuated, they are also normalized. For Foucault, this means that the modern disciplinary system “measures in quantitative terms and hierarchizes in terms of value the abilities, the level, the ‘nature’ of the individuals. It introduces, through this ‘value-giving’ measure, the constraint of a conformity that must be achieved” (Foucault 183). The value and potential of a person in this case is not, as Jumpei argues, something that individuals have an a priori right to exercise to the best of their ability. Rather, it is a social standard by which each individual is measured and to which each is made to adhere. In other words, Jumpei’s value lies wholly in his potential sand-shoveling ability. When he does not conform to this standard, the villagers punish him. Jumpei is faced with what Foucault describes as a contradiction of definitions of the individual:

The individual is no doubt the fictitious atom of an ‘ideological’ representation of society; but he is also a reality fabricated by this specific technology of power that I have called ‘discipline’. (194)

Jumpei’s belief in an ideological individual that is in some way special is what drives him to try to escape normalized society through entomology, as well as what makes him argue that all individuals must be able to use their abilities as best they are able. In the village, however, individuality is a means by which the social structure can normalize and control the subject, keeping it inside the community.

In *Beasts Head for Home*, the boundaries that Kyuzo runs into lock him out from social fields that he wants to join, whether they are the physical gates in the Japanese compound or the ever-receding border of the imagined ideal Japan. In *The Woman in the Dunes*, however, borders serve two interrelated roles. First, they are

the individuating and normalizing social restrictions that act to keep the individual inside, unable to escape the community. The village provides a physical manifestation of the manner in which existence in the city is isolated and measured. While unwilling to consciously acknowledge it, Jumpei recognizes at a certain level that “his involvement with sand and his insect collecting were, after all, simply ways to escape, however temporarily, from his obligations and the inactivity of his life” (Abe *Woman* 40). This need to escape of course becomes more visceral in the village. He wants to be free from the physical walls of the sand pit, believing that there is somehow a more open and meaningful world outside.

Outside is only the chaotic turbulence of the sand, however. The second role of the boundaries of the village in *The Woman in the Dunes* is to represent the manner in which modern society, while simultaneously producing and produced by the rapid process of modernization, still also desires and attempts “to remain and cohere” (Bolton 176). The village symbolizes how communal structures remain bound to past forms of social formation that still try to construct eternally fixed and impermeable totalities:

Abe explores exactly this condition, this desperate clinging to a traditional mode, this ‘restoration’, which the transformed, technological world has made impossibly out-dated, this flight from a metaphysical re-evaluation of human social norms in favour of a scientific blind faith in the forces of reasonless rationalization. (Iles 43-4)

While Iles frames the problem in terms of fixedness on rationalism, in a wider sense, Abe's conception of the state is a social field that is resistant to the very process of upheaval that it produces. The village in *The Woman in the Dunes* takes this conservative tendency to the extreme. Like the easily knowable world that Kyuzo dreams of, the village represents how communities try to maintain a sedentary existence, firmly protected from the flows of smooth space outside. While this might have once been possible, however, the modern world is one in which the overwhelming flux threatens to overtake the individual subjectivity that is still trying to keep it out. Jumpei's interest in the qualities and unique characteristics of sand hints at an unconscious understanding of the futility of a mode of life that insists on maintaining stability:

Sand, which didn't even have a form of its own – other than the mean 1/8-mm. diameter. Yet not a single thing could stand against this shapeless, destructive power. The very fact that it had no form was doubtless the highest manifestation of its strength, was it not?

[.....]

The cities of antiquity, whose immobility no one doubted. ... Yet, after all, they too were unable to resist the law of the flowing 1/8-mm. sands. (Abe *Woman* 31, 41)

Immobility is directly linked to antiquated modes of existence and community. The village continues these attempts to remain static despite their futility.

Although Jumpei wants to escape, he is unable to survive outside the borders. His identity is too much rooted in the concept of an idealized community. He tells

the woman, "I'm not a tramp – unfortunately for you. I pay my taxes, and I'm a registered student" (Abe *Woman* 59). Like Kyuzo, Jumpei has a conception of self, and therefore of rights and protections afforded a citizen of a state, that is dependent upon connection to state social systems. When he does manage to escape, he is at first awed by the dune landscape: "he shuddered with an uncanny loneliness for people" (181). The smooth space of the sand dunes is a place where sedentary communities cannot survive. It resists the codes of the social field and stands for a deterritorialized existence:

Beautiful scenery need not be sympathetic to man. His own viewpoint in considering the sand to be a rejection of the stationary state was not madness ... a 1/8-mm. flow ... a world where existence was a series of states. The beauty of sand, in other words, belonged to death. It was the beauty of death that ran through the magnificence of its ruins and its great power of destruction. (182-3)

The villagers recapture him essentially by driving him further into the dunes and away from any sort of communal territory. He becomes caught in quicksand and, before drowning in the flow of the sand, cries for help:

The stock expression! Well, let it be a stock expression. What was the use of individuality when one was on the point of death? He wanted to go on living under any circumstances, even if his life had no more individuality than a pea in a pod. (201)

When faced with death, Jumpei immediately desires reintegration within the borders of a community that can ensure, at the very least, survival.

Jumpei desires escape from the restrictive sedentary village existence because his conception of identity is such that he believes he has rights and freedoms to exist as an individual. His contempt for the seemingly meaningless village existence is based on his misunderstanding that his former life was, in some way, more valuable. He muses to himself that “Love of Home and obligation have meaning only if one stands to lose something by throwing them away” (Abe *Woman* 190). To Jumpei, nothing would be lost by rejecting life in the village. He does not consciously acknowledge that his ideological upbringing has been constructed around the illusion that his city life is more meaningful than shoveling away sand. Until faced with the threat of death, Jumpei does not recognize implicit value in merely maintaining community coherence in order to survive in the midst of chaos. While he is told to believe in an individual subjectivity, that subjectivity is unable to exist outside the boundaries of the social field.

In contrast to Jumpei, who wants to escape, the woman understands her relationship with the community and is satisfied with believing in the system of sedentary existence. When he asks whether she ever desires to get out of the pit and simply walk around, she replies, “Really, they used to make me walk a lot. Until I came here. I used to carry a baby around for a long time. I was really tired out with all the walking” (Abe *Woman* 89). Jumpei is startled by this admission:

Yes, he remembered, when everything was in ruins some ten years ago, everybody desperately wanted not to have to walk. And now, were they gluttons with this freedom from walking? (89-90)

Although Abe does not indicate concrete locations or times in *The Woman in the Dunes*, this exchange might refer to World War II. If so, this would in turn hint that the woman was perhaps one of the 3.2 million Japanese civilians who had lived in Japanese colonies on the mainland (Gordon 228) and were forced to return to Japan at the war's conclusion. As is clear in *Beasts Head for Home*, the chaos of war is a major cause of disruption and atomization of existence. Kyuzo's regulated and comfortable life is fragmented by Japan's defeat. The woman's remark recalls Kyuzo's journey across the Manchurian plains, when he wanted to stop yet was unable to do so. In that situation, individuality and personal ability have little meaning, and communal belonging, even if it means existing only to maintain that community, is preferable to remaining totally isolated and wandering.

Jumpei likens an existence of rootless wandering to having a one-way ticket: "A one-way ticket is a disjointed life that misses the links between yesterday and today, today and tomorrow" (Abe *Woman* 161). This experience is like Kyuzo's existence immediately after having his life within a hometown fractured, when he had no continuity between his past and future. A one-way ticket implies no anchored departure point to return to. That is, it represents the lack of a rooted conception of a hometown. Individuals who have become disconnected from the social framework have only a one-way ticket, and they no longer have a home community that they can come back to. At the same time, however, those who have a round-trip ticket and a hometown also feel a sense of entrapment. Jumpei, for example, feels the need to escape despite having a community he belongs to: "It would not be strange at all if 'The Round-Trip Ticket Blues' were the song of

mankind imprisoned" (161-2). This idea of a round-trip ticket tied to an original hometown is the basis of ideal communities. It is an Oedipal point of departure for the construction of identity to which one always returns. Jumpei thinks of the woman:

She was a stupid creature whose only merit was that she clung to her round-trip ticket ... like him. But even with the same round-trip ticket, if the point of departure was different, the destination was naturally different too. (172)

Jumpei recognizes that there is no fundamental difference between his and the woman's existences. But he believes that they have different origins, that is, different communities that they somehow have an intrinsic connection to.

If members of a sedentary social field carry a round-trip ticket, the flowing turbulence of the sand requires a one-way ticket. After escaping, Jumpei thinks about the means of existing outside the village in the dunes:

Certain kinds of mice that are said to drink their own urine in place of water, or insects that feed on spoiled meat, or nomadic tribes who know only the one-way ticket at best, can adjust their lives to the desert. If from the beginning you always believed that a ticket was only one-way, then you wouldn't have to try so vainly to cling to the sand like an oyster to a rock. (Abe *Woman* 183)

The sand is nomadic space. In contrast to the striated space of the village or the city that has been measured and ruled with walls, the dunes are smooth, deterritorialized space:

If the nomad can be called the Deterritorialized par excellence, it is precisely because there is no reterritorialization *afterward* as with the migrant, or upon *something else* as with the sedentary. ... With the nomad, on the contrary, it is deterritorialization that constitutes the relation to the earth, to such a degree that the nomad reterritorializes itself, in a way that provides the nomad with a territory. (Deleuze & Guattari *Thousand* 421).

The sedentary village is an entity that reterritorializes the land and attempts to perpetuate a measurable and immobile state. Within nomadic space a round-trip ticket is impossible. A rooted, defined point of origin for subjectification is impossible because, “instead of striating space, one occupies it with a vector of deterritorialization in perpetual motion” (Deleuze & Guattari *Thousand* 427). The turbulence outside the boundaries of the community requires a mode of existence that is not based on orienting oneself around a fixed point in the center. Human subjectivity, however, is unable to exist as pure vector of deterritorialization. There is still a need for stability and a coherent community.

On its face, Jumpei’s fate seems more optimistic than Kyuzo’s. When the woman is taken to the hospital due to a problematic pregnancy, the rope ladder is left behind. Jumpei hesitantly climbs up but ultimately decides to stay:

There was no particular need to hurry about escaping. On the two-way ticket he held in his hand now, the destination and time of departure were blanks for him to fill in as he wished. In addition, he

realized that he was bursting with a desire to talk to someone about the water trap. (Abe *Woman* 239)

In attempting to build a device that would help him escape, Jumpei inadvertently finds a way of collecting fresh water from the sand. This discovery makes him feel that, although “he was still in the hole ... it seemed as if he were already outside” (235). He believes that he has become independent from the villagers who can no longer threaten him by withdrawing water. Additionally, this device provides him a reason for remaining in the community. Like the possible discovery of a new species of insect, which he believes would make his name “perpetuated in the memory of his fellow men by being associated with an insect” (Abe *Woman* 10), Jumpei assumes that creation of the well opens up the possibility of integration with the community of the villagers. The device gives him a sense of meaning to life as its creator. But this sense of freedom is illusory. Not only is he still entirely dependent on the villagers for survival even with the well, but there is also no indication that they would even have interest in it as they are resistant to any change in how the village operates. While the novel ends ambiguously, it is more than likely that, although desiring to escape, Jumpei has merely integrated himself into an existence identical to that of the city. Moreover, the woman’s extra-uterine pregnancy suggests that the possibility of new life does not exist within this community. The village may be maintaining a kind of equilibrium, but this “stability can only mean entropy, slow death, while our sense of progress and growth is our only way of knowing for sure that we are alive” (Berman 95). There is no development within the walls of this social field. Even survival is questionable as they must rely on forcefully integrating

people, supposing that they do not die like the postcard dealer whom the village had captured before.

At the novel's conclusion, Jumpei thinks, "Perhaps, along with the water in the sand, he had found a new self" (Abe *Woman* 236). But this feeling of freedom is only personal and says nothing about the chance of creating a new social field. He ultimately chooses to remain in a fixed existence although in a different community than before. Jumpei's visions hint at possibilities for a new mode of existence that can thrive outside these boundaries, even if he himself is unable to follow them.

While watching the woman shoveling, Jumpei imagines:

If a ship floated on water, then it would also float on sand. If they could get free from the concept of stationary houses, they wouldn't have to waste energy fighting the sands. A ship – a house – which flowed along, borne up by the sand ... shapeless towns and cities. (Abe *Woman* 42)

This vision is of a way to live within deterritorialized space that is not striated or controlled by walls and barriers. Rather than trying to permanently fix a centered position within the turbulent sands, this method of existing moves with it, entirely different from "the dreary way human beings clung together year in year out" (14-5). The shapeless nature of these new forms of cities means that the imagined future communities are no longer stationary or defined. They are able to adapt to the chaotic flow of modernity, creating subjects who are no longer anchored to the Oedipal ideal of a totalized identity. This new means of existence, however, "is

something of which [Jumpei] cannot fully conceive, and he must remain a prisoner of his own weak ambitions" (Iles 74).

The Woman in the Dunes differs from *Beasts Head for Home* in that the supposed ideal community, and what forms the subject, is no longer strictly the nation. Thus, the space between borders is not simply territory that lies between national lines. Instead, there is a universal conception of a stable community within which individuals are interpellated as subjects through social structures while at the same time being given ideals of individual potential and freedom. Jumpei seeks escape from boundaries of existence that take the form both of systems of discipline that restrict movement within the social field and systems that attempt to wall off the chaotic nomadic exterior where previous modes of communal existence become impossible. The subject is still too dependent on a conception of the individual that carries a two-way ticket. While staring at ripples in the sand, Jumpei begins to think:

Supposing they were sound waves, what kind of music would they give? he wondered. Maybe even a human being could sing such a song ... if tongs were driven into his nose and slimy blood stopped up his ears ... if his teeth were broken one by one with hammer blows, and splinters jammed into his urethra ... if a vulva were cut away and sewn into his eyelids. It might resemble cruelty, and then again it might be a little different. (Abe *Woman* 160)

In *The Woman in the Dunes*, Abe imagines the reconstitution of the human subject. It is a process that resembles cruelty in that it requires a deconstruction and

reorientation of what we believe to be a complete self. Jumpei is not and cannot be the realization of this new individual, but he offers a vision of its possibility.

CHAPTER 4

THE RUINED MAP

Abe published *The Ruined Map* five years after *The Woman in the Dunes*. *The Ruined Map* is a detective novel whose nameless narrator is hired by a woman and her mysterious brother to find her missing husband, Mr. Nemura, who vanished six months prior. With few clues, the narrator is routinely stymied in his investigation as his leads come to dead ends or unravel into even greater confusion. In the end, he loses himself and disappears in much the same way as the husband.

In *The Ruined Map*, the state operates through the landscape of the modern city. Unlike *Beasts Head for Home* or even *The Woman in the Dunes*, there is no space that is clearly outside the city's boundaries. It is always enlarging itself, making it impossible to ever be truly and permanently outside it. When the narrator of *The Ruined Map* visits the periphery of the city, he realizes that "with the outskirts of the city constantly expanding, in a single night town areas suddenly spring up from what had been fields" (Abe *Map* 90). The distinction between outside and inside space has become unclear as the city works to move its boundaries infinitely outward. Unlike the finite area of the village of *The Woman in the Dunes*, nomadic space does not exist outside the urban area but moves inwards to places where the state cannot establish total control. In her book *Fake Fish*, Nancy Shields quotes Abe:

There has always been a frontier atmosphere inside cities. Runaways and criminals have used the city as a hiding place. As in the case of the

doughnut shape, outside and inside are continued on the same surface.

If one runs toward the outside one will eventually turn around and arrive at the inside. (56)

Rather than escaping to the outside the borders, the opportunity for freedom exists in areas within the city “where the hand of the state does not reach” (57). The liminal subject is one who can freely transgress ideological borders inside the city that would restrict or otherwise govern movement.

A paradoxical series of processes exists within the city. The state attempts to control internal flows, individuating and isolating its subjects. Simultaneously, it is undergoing a turbulent process of expansion and modernization that frustrates any methods whereby individuals may fix themselves within the chaos. Like Jumpei, individuals desire an escape from restrictive boundaries, but do not have a strong enough subjectivity to survive outside them. Characters like Toyama, a man the narrator interviews for the case, and Tashiro, a coworker of Mr. Nemuro and a pathological liar, describe the act of disappearing as “a question of will” and “an act of will” (Abe *Ruined* 162, 241). Mr. Nemuro’s former boss says of Nemuro, “He didn’t seem to have that kind of courage at all” (56). Transgressing the boundaries of normative existence that are prescribed by the state requires will because, once having moved off the map, the individual becomes decentered. It is no longer strictly national belonging that defines identity because there is no external alterity anymore. However, identity is still based upon one’s role and relationships within the community, and so disconnection from that social field forces the subject to create his or her own individuality.

The experience of the city in *The Ruined Map* continues that of *The Woman in the Dunes*. Like the village that controls and atomizes life, the city as Abe envisions it is “home to fragmented people existing in unrealized alienation from their true individuality as cogs in a state-imposed social order” (Iles 16). Individuals do not choose to be subjects of the city but rather are absorbed automatically through “forced integration into a collectivity not of the individual’s own creation” (16). Japan’s modern cities, such as Tokyo, followed a pattern of development that mirrored and was in most ways based upon western cities. Like urban centers such as New York or London, the greater Tokyo area saw a massive population increase as it grew from seven and a half million people to thirty-five million in the period from 1920 to 2007 (Okata & Murayama 16). Abe’s conception of the urban landscape reflected western modernist visions of the city as a “personal, often isolated experience, with each inhabitant caught in his or her own subjectivity” (Lehan 129). Individuals are “locked within a prison of self” (129) in that they are unable to form strong interpersonal relationships and hence remain disconnected and anonymous.

In the place of meaningful connections, the state provides individuals with an identity as a unit of economic growth. Taking significant influence from western modernity, which grew out of Enlightenment ideals, the state emphasizes personal potential:

This sense of individual potentiality worked against the idea of the community, and in an industrial culture it led to an atomistic population... (Lehan 130)

The experience of modernity in the city, then, is contradictory. Its growth is dependent upon economic and industrial development, and so the state ideology both urges individual achievement while carefully restricting and binding the individual to itself:

The trouble with capitalism is that, here as elsewhere, it destroys the human possibilities it creates. It fosters, indeed forces, self-development for everybody; but people can develop only in restricted and distorted ways ... everything else within us, everything nonmarketable, gets draconically repressed, or withers away for lack of use, or never has a chance to come to life at all. (Berman 96)

While Berman's focus is on the rise of bourgeois capitalism, Abe's focus is on the project of modernization itself. The city harnesses its own chaotic nature as a product of the decoding flows of modernity insofar as they fuel growth even if it means the destruction of the subjects within it.

The flows of what Deleuze and Guattari term the capitalist production-machine exist as part of the general turbulence. This machine is predicated on "the generalized decoding of flows, the new massive deterritorialization, the conjunction of deterritorialized flows" (*Anti-Oedipus* 224). In *The Ruined Map*, this appears in such ways as the decoded forms of previous communal relationships that the individual now operates for personal benefit, as well as in the expansion of the city itself. For example, Tashiro tells the narrator:

That stupid business. I'd like to put the torch to it when I think how they prostitute valuable human lives for a business like that. But I

suppose it's the same no matter where you go. As long as you work there, somehow or other you've got to try and rise to head clerk, then section head, then department head. At least it's just too miserable if you don't do something. You get ahead of your fellow workers and dance attendance on your superiors. Even fellows who don't have any hope for advancement try to pull the others down. (Abe *Ruined* 221-2)

The state summons the individual to develop his or her ability in order to expand the economic system, even if such development is at the expense of others. There is also flux within the very growth of the city on its margins, where there is a constant de- and reterritorialization of the economic flows:

But along with the spread of the residential areas toward the suburbs, the charcoal dealers were also extending their business in propane gas, and the more the population increased, the more they prospered. But just as inevitably as the great reptiles ultimately had to give way to the mammals, they too would be taken over by city gas. They were born of the city's growth and of that growth they would die – a paradoxical business. (Abe *Ruined* 85)

In the end, it is the state that comes to take firm hold of the newly striated territory before moving on and expanding still further. The city provides an illusion of stability to subjects in the form of an atomized and dehumanizing existence:

The first beat of the city's heart is a signal; within a five-minute period hundreds of filing cabinets are unlocked at one click and swarms of different but indistinguishable workers, like a wall of water released

from the floodgates of a dam, suddenly through the streets ... a time of living. (20)

Within the expanse of the urban landscape, individual subjects have a specific location and path that the state provides. The missing man in *The Ruined Map* is one of the many who escape from that path.

As in Abe's other works, *The Ruined Map* deploys the image of the map to represent the manner in which individuals fix themselves inside coded and definite boundaries located firmly in the turbulent shift. Like Kyuzo, the individual finds comfort in a small, knowable location. Within the labyrinthine complexity of the always-expanding city, the desire to locate the self implies a need to reduce the range of one's territory. The narrator's client tells him about her brother: "He says a single map for life is all you need. ... You should go only through places where everyone goes ..." (Abe *Ruined* 29). Similarly, when the narrator asks Mr. Nemuro's boss what he means by calling the act of disappearing courageous, he says:

Even though I can understand how relieved a man might feel in doing what he did, I couldn't have done it myself. I could never do a thing like that. I'm going to stay right here till I die unless I'm forced out. A man eats and defecates. It's a handicap to move away from the place where you get your food. And it's always a lot better to defecate in the same place too. (56)

Here is the perfect, anchored existence. Reminiscent of Kyuzo's dream of a single room with nothing beyond the road outside, the boss's ideal is a totally rooted world

where one need not move at all. To decenter oneself, as Mr. Nemuro did when he disappeared, is to break off from any kind of communal stability.

It is clear that the narrator views the city in terms of the ease with which it can or cannot be mapped. His description of the client's apartment complex portrays the linear and structured nature of the architecture and layout:

It was as if I were looking at some patterned infinity: the four-storied buildings, identical in height, each floor with six doors, were lined up in rows of six to the right and left. Only the fronts of the buildings, facing the road, were painted white, and the color stood out against the darkish green of the sides, emphasizing even more the geometric character of the view.

.....

12 East 3. East stands for the right side of the street, 3 for the third building from the front, facing the street, 12 for the second-floor apartment facing the landing at the left end. (Abe *Ruined* 7, 8)

The massive buildings are isolated, like a "human filing cabinet with endless filing-card apartments" (8). They individuate people, providing only the bare necessities of sedentary life. They also allow transmittable and understandable coordinates to point to the location of the individual inside the complexity of the city. Within this system, the code of an address represents the ability to easily articulate one's position but only so long as the structure is stable and the individual remains within it. The image of the map, however, emphasizes how arbitrary this coding is. Maps claim to represent reality, but they really are a proposition by a certain power about

the makeup of that reality. A map “presents us with the reality we *know* as differentiated from the reality we *see* and *hear* and *feel*” (Wood 16). Rather than a direct link to a real existence, a map is “cultural artifact, an accumulation of choices made among choices every one of which reveals a value” (Wood 78). Maintaining one’s existence within the boundaries of the map, then, is an agreement to join and adhere to a communal system of understood reality.

While a reliable map perhaps is possible when confined to the smallest possible area, as the client’s brother advises, the expansion and shift of the city makes it impossible to understand it in its totality or even to find others, since the accuracy of the maps perpetually breaks down. When the narrator visits an area on the outskirts of the city, he cannot find the section he wants because “on [his] map (published in the previous year) there is no such division into wards, and the relative position of the streets appears to be quite different” (Abe *Ruined* 79). The outdated map does not show reality but rather a series of relations that are at once fluid and dictated by the state as it works to expand and transform itself. Like the subjectivity that wants to root itself in belonging to a national community, the individual who wants to fix him or herself on a map holds the belief that these frameworks are stable. But the map cannot fully contain the nature of the shifting city and can only offer a restrictive and simplified representation of it.

Beyond the chaotic shifting of the city’s alignment, maps, as representations of a reality that the state prescribes, are also unable to chart areas that are beyond the city’s ideological reach. These are the decoded spaces underneath the superficial areas that the state can control. When the narrator meets Tashiro, he follows a map

Tashiro draws to find a meeting spot. He later complains to Tashiro that he was unable to find the spot because the map is wrong. Tashiro replies, "It's not so much the map ... the underground passages are hard to follow" (Abe *Ruined* 214). Unlike the individuals in *The Woman in the Dunes*, those in *The Ruined Map* who have access to this alternate topography cannot be reflected in the coding of the state. At the edge of the city, where construction continues to expand its borders, the narrator overhears a drunken construction worker:

"I'm on the list of missing persons for investigation. Ha, ha. My wife's put in a request at the town hall for an all-out search"

.....

"What's a missing person? I'll send a letter. If they knew I was working that'd be the end of the welfare checks. That's what I told my wife."

(Abe *Ruined* 119)

As far as the state is concerned, slipping off the official map has caused the man to disappear altogether. Official recognition of his identity is only valid as long as he remains locatable by the state. Once in the alternate space, he is reduced to needing others to assure him: "Look, you've got hands and feet; it's a big laugh, you being missing. You are right here, aren't you?" (119). There is a distinction between existence as a physical presence and that as a member of the community in which physicality provides no guarantees of identification. Rather, identity is preserved only within the state structure.

Like nationality, identity within the city is empty because it is based on systems of value external to the individual. Methods of proving identity within

modernity, such as licenses and enrollment in government registers, are systems of individuation that tell you “what [you are], not who [you are]” (Donald 97). There are numerous instances of characters attempting to either strengthen or stabilize their identity and existence within the social field. The client describes her husband, the missing man, as having “license mania” (Abe *Ruined* 134). Before he disappeared, he tried to fulfill himself by attaining a variety of licenses in everything from movie projectionist to handling explosives. These licenses function as identification cards, providing a sense of rational control over one’s surroundings. They are connected to the city that issues them. They are signs of an attempt at finding identity within its boundaries. Ultimately, they are not enough, however, and the client chooses to vanish from the surface of the city.

Nemuro’s coworker, Tashiro, perpetually lies to the narrator regarding Nemuro:

There are two reasons why I have to make up stories like I did. I was afraid ... you know what I mean ... when I considered that Mr. Nemuro had disappeared for no reason, I realized I had been completely abandoned. No, I suppose that’s not quite right. Maybe I should call it an inferiority complex ... or jealousy. (Abe *Ruined* 237)

Tashiro’s lies are a means whereby he can try to make some kind of connection with another individual. He recognizes Nemuro’s disappearance as an act of will but cannot duplicate it. Instead, he tries to form a relationship with the narrator by offering understandable clues to the case. When the narrator rejects him, Tashiro kills himself, accusing the narrator of being unfeeling. Tashiro is desperate to

connect with him in some way. He says, "As long as it's expressed in words, any lie has some meaning" (257). There is value, then, in the very act of communication regardless of the content of the words. The narrator is closed off, however, and that communication is impossible.

As in *The Woman in the Dunes*, the women in *The Ruined Map* are instances of being satisfied with a settled existence within the state structure. The narrator's wife, from whom he has separated, operates a dressmaking business named Piccola, which, based on her childhood nickname, refers to maintaining life within a small territory. When visiting the store, the narrator notes of the area, "In this neighborhood, the structural appearance of a main street had been established without too much unnaturalness" (Abe *Ruined* 166). The narrator senses the way in which this existence has not been forced upon her. His wife deliberately chose to open the shop, integrating herself into the city's economic structure centering on fashion and material goods. Within her finite world, she has created a sort of community of her own, taking on a female assistant with whom, the narrator suspects, she might "have lesbian tendencies" (169). The wife, then, not only has fixed herself within the system but also has created a tangible relationship with another individual that is not based on normative social values. She has created her own voluntary community within the larger structure by limiting her experience to the walls of the store.

The narrator's client, too, exists entirely within the confines of her apartment, and the narrator falls for her because she offers a way to stabilize his own existence. By becoming a detective, whose job is to wander through the city's maps, the

narrator detached himself from the ordinary limited routes that define normalized life. Through her, he hopes to once again fix himself to a structure that he partially left. He latches onto the lemon-yellow curtains hanging in the woman's apartment as a symbol of a sedentary domestic existence that limits itself to the state-structured apartment complex and an easy round-trip commute as one of the indistinguishable workers. The curtains become a beacon in the chaos, some marker by which he may orient himself. They are a clear and permanent code for the woman and her location on the map. He becomes so reliant on the curtains that he falls into complete disarray when she changes them, almost unable to locate her apartment:

It wasn't there! The lemon-yellow window was gone! Curtains of white and brown vertical stripes, completely different, were hanging in the place where the lemon-yellow window should have been. What in the name of God had happened? If I wanted to know I had only to advance thirty-two paces, go up the stairs, and ring the bell at the left of the door on the second floor. But I could not. Since the curtains had changed so radically, the person who would come to greet me would doubtless have turned from lemon to zebra. (*Abe Ruined* 248)

Changing the curtains is like altering the legend on a map that someone uses to locate him or herself. The very nature of the narrator's connection to the city is shaken, and his ability to recognize the woman's identity has come into question.

The narrator's role as a detective is to find an individual who has disappeared from the map. His job is not to create or fix the map or its code itself:

There were too many blank spaces on the map. Therefore, I had no obligation to force myself to fill them in, I was no guardian of the law.

(Abe *Ruined* 34)

It is not his task to create a complete map for those who live on it. He does not spread the state ideology in order to keep people within the boundaries of the official topography. In past modes of detective fiction, the detective's role is to "bring the city back to human scale," or to "[reconstruct] past events from modern clues" (Lehan 84) in order to demystify seemingly irrational actions and restore order to the city. The detective is the one who can successfully connect with a lost individual by establishing clear lines of cause and effect in order to bring them back within normative boundaries. *The Ruined Map*, however, is an anti-detective novel. Like the anti-hero who points out the manner in which traditional social structures are broken and no longer capable of producing the classic hero, the anti-detective shows how the former detective is no longer possible. The narrator clearly possesses the skills of a detective:

Though I was not particularly aware of it, I had the habit of grasping the distinguishing features of things seen and filing them away. I formed portraits with them, and when I needed to I could draw them out and at once restore them to their original state. (Abe *Ruined* 11)

These faculties are entirely useless, though, because the codes and signs that he possesses do not actually have any meaning. They are not bound to some signified that he can trace back to.

Regardless, the narrator continues to believe that, behind the chaos of the city, there is some kind of prime mover. He constantly looks for linear cause-and-effect relationships in the world around him. When a fight is about to break out near a construction site between rival gangs, one of which has the client's brother as a member, the narrator can only think that there is someone pulling the strings:

Even if something were brewing, it would doubtless be at most some unpleasant words or demonstration. A demonstration would mean, in other words, that the brother had enemies. The most important thing now was to get some clue as to who the enemy was. There's a beginning and an end to every cycle. In any labyrinth, if there's an entrance there's got to be an exit. (Abe *Ruined* 118)

The detective cannot actually sense the completely decoded chaos that exists under the superficially complete map of the city. Although his job is ostensibly to bring order back to the state, he is incapable of letting go of systems of meaning that say that, behind every signifier, there is a clear signified. The map has gaps, but he has faith in its ability to accurately represent reality and grows frustrated or becomes lost when it does not.

The narrator's status as a detective acts as a kind of halfway point between the average state subject and the totally free individual element that has broken away from the system. Unlike his wife or client, he lives a semi-nomadic existence, telling his client, "As for me, I need maps, ten or twenty of them" (Abe *Ruined* 30). He moves through the city in order to locate others who have disappeared, but he does so with the conviction that he and the missing individual will always return to the

space within the ideological boundaries: “Usually as soon as a missing person’s been discovered, he calmly goes back to his former haunts, as if he has suddenly recovered from some demonic possession” (133). The narrator actually feels anxiety about the possibility of dropping off the map. When considering a box of matches from different sources left behind by Nemuro, which is a clue that continues to act as an empty sign, he becomes aware of this danger: “If I thought about this too much, I had the perilous presentiment that I could not help but tread willy-nilly among the blank spaces on the map” (41). Leaving the delineated and clear sections of the map would mean losing his ability to form rational causal relationships between clues. If he were to do so, he would fall into the chaotic flows that sit underneath the state control.

Although the narrator’s aim as a detective is to “get the boundary lines of the map absolutely clear” (Abe *Ruined* 100), his existence as a semi-nomadic individual points to his own personal desire to disconnect himself from the state structures. Before leaving his wife and becoming a detective, the narrator worked in an office similar to Nemuro’s, where his “life was such that there would never be a solution unless [he] won out over the competition in the office” (173). He was a unit within the same abstract and combative set of human relations as the rest of the anonymous workforce. His leaving the job and his family was, as his wife declares, an act of running away. Like his client’s husband, he escaped from a series of normative boundaries that would dictate all too strictly his existence within the city. Unlike the husband, however, he has not disappeared entirely. He still remains at least somewhat rooted within the state, deriving his identity from his coded role as

a detective. He experiences a feeling of escape through pure and unbounded movement when, for example, driving on the freeway:

I was a point of tenseness. I had the sensation of suddenly awakening on a calendarless day at a place that appeared on no map. You are free to call this sufficiency flight if you wish. When a pirate becomes a pirate and sets sail for unknown seas or when a brigand becomes a brigand and conceals himself in the depths of a city or a forest or an uninhabited desert, both – surely some place, some time – feel like this. (175)

Unlike the restricted back and forth of individuals within the city who leave their home with a specific goal only to return each time, this is the pure, nomadic movement of an individual carrying only a one-way ticket. There are neither limiting boundaries nor a center of existence to which one must return.

In the end, the narrator rejects the safety of life with the woman just as her husband had done before. He leaves her apartment and, in doing so, steps off the map, losing his memory and identity. The apartment complex and the town around it that had once been so neatly organized in his mind become complete blanks. He no longer has any way of mapping the city or his place within it. The narrator has become completely isolated and adrift within the labyrinth and feels “an unbearable sense of loneliness” (Abe *Ruined* 278). At first, completely disoriented, he tries to center himself within a coffee shop. Although he cannot remember it, he has “the feeling that it was some kind of starting point” (280). At this point, the narrator still needs an origin or an anchor, since he is not able to function separately from any

and all boundaries. The coffee shop acts as a kind of hometown where he can locate himself in relation to the rest of the world.

Within the coffee shop, the narrator attempts to establish who he is. Because his previous identity was based on the relationships he had with the social field, once detached from it, he is unable to produce any sense of self. He becomes like Tashiro, about whom the narrator tells his client, “It was others who proved both his existence and his whereabouts, but since not a single one took any notice of him...” (Abe *Ruined* 268). Identity and recognition as a subject are purely relational. They are based on one’s integration into a community that acknowledges the individual’s subjectivity. Ignoring Tashiro in essence made him disappear. Likewise, the narrator’s lack of relationships means that he no longer has any personal identity. He casts about for connections with the people around him, imagining links between himself and the employees of the coffee shop in order to fit himself into some kind of social structure.

In the final lines of the novel, the narrator makes a decision to reject everything. He decides that what he now needs is “a world [he himself] had chosen. It had to be [his] world, which [he] had chosen by [his] own free will” (Abe *Ruined* 298). Once again, he becomes a wanderer, but neither is he like the members of the crowd in the train station desperately clinging to their goals in order to maintain a routine, nor is he like the individual he was in his previous life, trying to navigate the world via impossible symbols. Instead, he wanders “relying on a map [he] did not comprehend” (299). Like the husband and all the other individuals who escaped or disappeared, he becomes an urban nomad who has neither a definite destination

nor an origin. He has completely broken away from social systems of meaning and identity, moving towards the decoded flows that run through the liminal spaces within the city. As he walks away, the narrator sees the body of a dead cat:

And when, unconsciously, I tried to give a name to the flattened cat,
for the first time in a long time an extravagant smile melted my cheeks
and spread over my face. (299)

This is an act of trying to construct one's own structure of signification. The narrator gains the means to inscribe his own personal meaning upon the world, de- and reterritorializing the world around him. His subjectivity takes on a kind of schizophrenic tendency wherein he "has at his disposal his very own recording code, which does not coincide with the social code, or coincides with it only in order to parody it" (Deleuze and Guattari *Anti-Oedipus* 15). In rejecting the codes of the state, the individual gains the potential to write his or her own codes and to be open for the creation of a new form of subjectivity. The narrator of *The Ruined Map* becomes a liminal subject who can move through and beyond the borders that constrain existence within the community.

CONCLUSION

Through these three novels, it is possible to see Abe's development of an ontology of modern existence wherein the tension between the individual and the group defines social construction. Through his experiences in Manchuria and the collapse of the Japanese Empire, Abe witnessed the problematic way in which the individual's place in the world is dictated by the state. Early on, the modern nation-state provided a means for Abe to articulate how national identity and belonging to an abstract community act as anchors for subjectivity that is then defined precisely by that very connection. A community, such as the state, provides a totalizing Oedipal image of what identity should look like, forcing individuals to conform in order to be treated as citizens. Kyuzo's need to return to an idealized Japan illustrates the depth to which the state buries these roots, in that he cannot form an identity outside belonging to a community.

Eventually, however, the nation-state gives way in Abe's works to existence within any modern community. Abe's problem is no longer the borders that make movement from community to community difficult but rather those that the community itself uses to restrict and control its subjects. Existence in the modern social field is atomized, with people told to develop as individuals yet contradictorily forced to be subjects only as the state demands. Boundaries provide stability for consciousness that still operates under pre-modern modes of existence. Modern communities, however, are no longer places where each individual has an

integral and important role to play. Instead, they are sites where, like the nation-state, belonging is based on a metanarrative of an imagined shared history and identity, or where, like the city, individuals exist isolated from one another in a state of anxiety about their anonymity.

Abe's alternative is existence within the flows of "productive chaos that we see – or hear – in his written texts" (Bolton 199). His work is a search for a subject who can transcend the boundaries of the social structure and find a new means of existing that is rootless and detached from any a priori sense of self. Like other avant-garde artists, Abe saw a need to destabilize what came before and create a new alternative. In his view, the past consisted of restrictive attachment to a certain collective based on territorial belonging. Nation-states are merely attempts to copy that kind of existence in a world that has become far too turbulent to support it. As a period of chaotic development and upheaval, modernity cannot be walled off. Rather, a new subjectivity must be found that can withstand and even thrive in "permanent change, ... perpetual upheaval and renewal in every mode of personal and social life" (Berman 94). For Abe's new subjects, "the individual must be free to choose his path, must be free to create his own language, and must be free to create his own community" (Iles 16). For Abe, the nation-state, which individuates its subjects rather than being created by them, must give way to a new act of social formation. Abe's liminal subject is a step towards a new mode of consciousness. In this mode, one can exist in a fluid space where there are no preexisting structures that might project identity onto the individual. He does not condemn those who prefer to remain firmly fixed within a social field. But that is a limited and, to him,

unsatisfying mode of existence, which blocks off the potential contained within the chaotic flux.

Abe's dichotomy between movement and stasis is a clear way in which he develops both his anxiety about and hope for a different mode of living. Throughout Abe's work, the character of the wanderer, who may have the ability to transgress normative boundaries, is likewise no longer able to form relationships with others because he no longer has a connection to the community. Abe's characters inhabit what Kafka describes as the "borderland between solitude and community" (Liska 1). Because of the war, Abe was acutely aware of the fear and uncertainty that comes with the destruction of social systems and identity. He simultaneously believed, however, in the need to develop a nomadic way of living that does not insist on controlling or stopping flows of existence but moves with them in order to escape from totalizing systems of life towards greater possibilities for creating one's own map.

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