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FROZEN IN LONGING:
HAIKARA MODERNITY, CULTURAL TRANSFORMATION
AND THE THEATER OF KISHIDA KUNIO

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In *The Modern Girl as Militant*, Miriam Silverberg comments on the role of the *moga* and her ambivalent portrayal in the mass media.[1] Silverberg links the (alternately admiring and critical) images of the "modern girl" in 1920s' and 1930s' Japan with the history of working, militant Japanese women, and advocates looking "beyond the stereotype of the modern girl to see a discourse constituted by contradiction" (Silverberg 1991:261n9).

This essay considers the related and contradictory discourse surrounding the term *haikara* in the Taishō and early Shōwa periods, in particular the dynamic boundaries of the term *haikara* as reflected in the 1927–1928 journalistic writings of the prominent playwright Kishida Kunio. *Haikara* was a term of cultural admiration (meaning sophisticated, Western) or alternately of condemnation (meaning trendy, obsessed with the new). Japanese writers such as Kishida attempted to come to terms with changing cultural values and assumptions, and their struggle is reflected in the changing valences of such newly coined terms of cultural evaluation. In the second part of this essay, I focus on Kishida's 1927 play, *Onshitsu no mae* (*Before the Greenhouse*), and its representations of cultural change and ideologies of marriage. In this wonderful but little-known play, Kishida describes a brother and sister who become stagnant or motionless observers of a speedy, *haikara* world.

Haikara (from "high collar") has been defined as sophisticated, trendy, foppish (*seiyōfū o kidottari, ryūkō o ottari, atarashigattari suru koto*). Sometimes it is rendered sarcastically with the kanji *hai-kara* or (ash-shell or ashen husk), a critical twist that emphasizes the emptiness of *haikara* as fad and fashion. In the late 1920s, the term was often used in criticism of the Japanese experimental poets who are the focus of my recent work, poets

1 "One way of dealing with the complexity of the contemporary woman's multifaceted image was to liken her to a colorless proteus who has been liberated from the darkness of her household, to take on the hues of its environment." (SILVERBERG 1991, pp. 261n69)

who adapted ideas from European surrealism, Dada, and other avant-garde movements.[2]

Kishida Kunio, one of the best known *shingeki* (New Theater) playwrights and later founder of the Bungakuza theater, published a three-part essay analyzing *haikara* (*"Haikara" to iu koto*) in the *Tōkyō asahi shinbun* (*Tōkyō Asahi Newspaper*) on April 3–5, 1927. He begins his review by pointing to the fact that *haikara* itself was fast becoming an outmoded term by 1927: "It has come to the point that by this day and age, when one hears someone say, 'That man is so *haikara*,' one becomes curious not so much about the man described, but rather, about what kind of person the speaker might be." His column on *haikara* was published in the newspaper (beside a serialized novel by Mushanokōji Saneatsu) alongside visually trendy ads for Lincoln and Ford automobiles, caramel and chocolate candies, cosmetics, and other contemporary Tōkyō innovations. In his definition of *haikara*, Kishida claims that the "high-collar" man, in addition to wearing his Western suit, "would most certainly also choose to wear a showy necktie, prefer to wear clear glasses, and further, wear sharp pointed shoes. Similarly such a man would likely have a good grasp of English, and would try to please (or humor) the ladies." In other words, he writes, "the word is a matter not only of clothing, but of attitude, tastes, and temperament"; beyond merely designating fashion, *haikara* comes to describe a way of being, a existential stance, and even a playful erotics. "But," writes Kishida, "at the same time

2 See SAS 1999 (forthcoming). For a different term that has similar associations, one might remark on such works as Kitasono Katsue's *Haiburau no seishin* (*The High-Brow Spirit*; 1936) from his collection *Haiburau no funsui* (*Fountain of the Highbrow*). *Haiburau* can mean "learned" but also "pretentious," "vain about one's learning" (KITASONO 1988, pp. 247–253). The surrealist poets who adopted ideas and elements from European poetics were often accused of effecting a superficial copying, a pretentious "putting on of airs." The poets' explicit references to European elements in poetry (the use of European terms and reference to Surrealist and other avant-garde poetics), along with the poets' cosmopolitan attitudes and tastes provoked such accusations against them and all who put on "European airs." Particularly provoking was their playful stance that seemed to deflect attention from Japan's serious problems of labour and politics, or the rise in imperial colonialism and (in the late 1930s) the impending war and economic scarcity. Silverberg's article is one work that begins to relocate these cultural phenomena in context, and shows that they are not, after all, so disconnected from that historical context or other forms of more militant protest. The accusation, often leveled, of being *haikara* also became a self-proclaimed attitude or stance.

it also seems to incorporate a certain amount of contempt, or mockery. It is not a word that one would use to make a claim about oneself."

Revolt in style

In his 1927 column, Kishida struggles to fix a definition, and eventually to defend, the *haikara* aesthetic. Unlike his imagined contemptuous speaker, Kishida prefers to not consider *haikara* merely a frivolous imitation of the West (*keihakuna seiyō kabure*). Rather, comparing it to the Edo term for aesthetic sophistication, *iki*, he reads it as connoting a certain beauty (*bi*) to be found in Japanese daily life, tastes, and literature. In forming his evolving defense (which moves farther and farther from received readings of the term), Kishida comes to claim that, although there is a distinction between *iki* and *haikara*, haikara need not be defined exclusively in relation to things that are contemporary (*gendaishiki*, *tōseifū*) or linked to the West. He speculates on the possibility of a Japanese-style *haikara*, or a Western-style *iki*, emphasizing in both the description of attitude or stance. In the process he attempts to dissociate these terms from the specific national, ideological (and sartorial) contexts from which they emerged.

In the end, Kishida argues that *Makura no sōshi* (*The Pillow Book of Sei Shōnagon*) and *Genji monogatari* (*The Tale of Genji*) alike are, or were in their time, the height of *haikara*. This aestheticist argument for Japanese literature further removes *haikara* from its defining dependence on the impact of European or Western customs, clothing, and tastes, giving it universal transcendent qualities. At the same time, his argument raises *haikara* from the realm of daily habit and practice to the realm of high art. Kishida ultimately redefines *haikara* as "a free balance, an intelligent departure from old custom, a moderated fantasy, a consummately polished spirit of revolt" (Kishida 1927:5; April 5). In other words, *haikara* becomes a highly refined treason, in style.[3] One could see Kishida's view as depoliticizing the work

3 His definition takes revolt into the realm of fantasy, spirit, or a breaking of "forms." The relation between changes in the forms of cultural representation and transformation in social practices has been debated in contemporary theoretical writing through the questions of ideology and subjectivization, complicit critiques (a critique framed in forms that one did not invent, by a subject constituted within that symbolic realm), the possibility for challenging ideological assumptions while relying on forms struc-

of cultural and literary revolt (making it a matter of "mere" style): Kishida's overall body of work has often been seen in this conservative light, particularly during the postwar period but even during its own time. As noted by J. Thomas Rimer and others, Kishida's Bungakuza was the only contemporary new theater group allowed to be active during the war years, because its work was not considered to have political content (Rimer 1974:121). Yet, a closer examination of the work reveals a much more complex dynamic, a contradictory perspective on cultural change that does not simply resolve in the conservative direction.[4] Kishida's uses of European theatrical forms, as is well known, made an important contribution to the development of Japanese modern theater, and his representations of the ideologies of marriage and cultural change demand particularly close and sustained examination. Such representations, reframing subjects' "imaginary relations to their conditions of existence" (in Althusser's terms), make an intriguing intervention in the understanding of subjects' relations to their (sometimes foreclosed or frozen) desires and possibilities for action in the world.

Kishida's *Onshitsu no mae* (*Before the Greenhouse*), was published in *Chūō kōron* (vol. 42, no. 1) on January 1, 1927. This play has been almost completely ignored within Kishida's oeuvre.[5] The set of the play, throughout its three acts, is the dark, interior space of the living room of a brother and sister; a window in the back looks out on their greenhouse. Throughout the first act, the brother and sister repeatedly emphasize the closed, hermetic life they lead, the near absence of contact with the outside world.

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tured within (and saturated with) those very assumptions. Kishida's work is illuminating its negotiation of these possibilities and its emphasis at different moments on a style (seen removed from context) and, at other moments, a more radical hint of a possibility for cultural transformation.

4 Watanabe Kazutami also writes of the political implications and post-war reception of Kishida's wartime writings in the second chapter of his *Kishida Kunio ron*. See WATANABE 1982, pp. 71–74.

5 Kaneshita Tatsuo's recent and notable revival production (in summer 1997, *Za suzunari* theater, Shimokitazawa) challenged the boundaries of the now prevalent post-*shingeki* theatrical movement through an unexpected return to the world of Kishida Kunio's *shingeki* works. To some extent my reading of the work is indebted to his innovative directing and staging. Page numbers cited are from the original *Chūō kōron* publication of the script.

Ideals of marriage and domestic space

In the opening scene, Makiko, a central character of the play who is about 29 years old and "of unstriking appearance," explains to Yorie, a slightly younger woman wearing "neat and fresh Western clothes" that she and her brother hardly ever leave the house. Yorie and Makiko, old school friends, have not met in many years; Yorie works in a French makeup shop, while Makiko, who has studied sewing and typing, spends her time housekeeping and taking care her brother, who had suffered an earlier illness."We grew up, just the two of us, just brother and sister from a very young age, so I don't think it would be so unnatural were we to live the rest of our lives here together taking care of one another," says Makiko. "[Pause] But, if Brother were to have *that* inclination, I would leave the care of him to 'that person,' and it's not that I couldn't go out or do something" (Kishida 1927b:166). The brother and sister's life together exists in implicit tension with the possibility that one of them might, or should, get married.

The pause in Makiko's words, a device often used throughout the play, seems to mark the space of the possibility that such an event might occur. It also marks Makiko's recognition of the normative view, which brother and sister seem to share, that they might be happier or it might be "more natural" if they did marry. Each refers to the other's prospective marriage through indirection, as though their current situation were somehow shameful. The brother refers to the necessity of marrying off the sister (*katazukeru*; to marry off, finish, settle, or clean up).[6] She defends their situation as "not unnatural," clearly imagining that others would judge it so. The brother repeatedly admonishes Makiko to try to make the house more tidy and "home-like" (*ie rashiku*), implying that he perceives something shameful, dirty, or neglected in their domestic situation.

Kishida himself returned from a study trip to France in 1923; he wrote of performances of Ibsen's *A Doll's House* that he saw in France during his sojourn there (see below; Kishida 1989, vol. 21:63). One might compare this scene between Yorie and Makiko with the opening of *A Doll's House*, in

6 One might compare this view with many of the later works of film director Ozu Yasujirō, such as *Early Summer* (1951), in which the necessity of marrying off (*katazukeru*) a sister or daughter, combined with a reluctance to break up the nuclear family, forms the central dilemma of the film.

which two old school friends (Nora and Mrs. Linde) meet after a long absence and reflect on their lives (Ibsen 1957:7–21). Like Nora, Makiko lives in an enclosed, "safe" domestic space, a greenhouse, perhaps, rather than a doll's house, hot, close, stuffy; like Mrs. Linde, Yorie has entered the world of work. Whereas Nora has already fulfilled the convention of marriage and discovers that hers is meaningless, Makiko and her brother Susumu both silently think towards marriage as a hope, a source of rescue from their stagnation.

The characters idealize marriage as a possibility for progress and direction, and an escape from their vague sense of shame. Yet this escape appears an illusion, an impossible dream; the brother and sister, existing in their enclosed space, their "greenhouse air," seem disconnected from the movements of the outside world or the present moment. While brother and sister encounter the present through the other two characters in the play, Yorie and Nakahara (a friend who has just returned from France), this meeting, the flow of the dialogue itself, functions in the dynamic of a missed encounter, engendering desire but remaining ever so slightly off-kilter. The teleology of marriage in the play is thus a false teleology, albeit one in which the characters are deeply invested; through it Kishida's play sets in motion a subtle and dynamic complex of interlocking desires and foreclosures, frozen longings.

Near the opening of the play, Susumu returns home from greeting Nishihara who has just returned from France, where he has been studying "labor problems." The first conversation between Makiko and Susumu in the play takes place from the living room to the outside, with the brother calling out "What?" (*nante*) since he cannot hear her through the glass; this broken communication dramatizes the stagnant isolation of their domestic space.

> Makiko: Did you recognize him right away?
>
> Susumu: I recognized him. That Nishihara, in five years' time, he has become completely *haikara*. It seems he has really come up in the world (*shusse*). The people who came to welcome him were really impressive. The representative of such-and-such confederation, and the reporter from such-and-such newspaper—he was surrounded by people like that. I just greeted him briefly with a glance.
> (Kishida 1927b:171)

The scene of greeting a returned voyager on a dock may recall, from a very different context, the famous description of an analogous scene by Frantz Fanon, from whose work much of post-colonial theory draws its inspiration.

He describes a newcomer's return to Antilles after a sojourn in France: the traveller's compatriots await him, eager to observe his manner.[7] The language and gestures of the newcomer reveal where he stands in relation to his home country, the culture to which he formerly belonged. Fanon analyzes this encounter in terms of race and the impossible double-bind of the colonized subject. Kishida, like Fanon, focuses on the perspective of the one who greets the newcomer, who watches his every move and manner, and speculates on how he has changed, if he still recognizes his past. As with Fanon's returnee, Nishihara seems to have "come up in the world," he is transformed in the eyes of those who await him (in a way that reflects the unequal relation in their perception of French culture and their own). Nishihara goes so far as to suggest that Susumu might also take a trip: "You should marry off your sister and go to the West. If you do, you won't be so afraid of people. In short, you will become brazen, like me" (178).

Upon arrival at the dock in Yokohama, Nishihara speaks to a newspaper reporter about his experiences in French theater, and his plans to begin a populist theater in Tōkyō. In Susumu's eyes, the *haikara* Nishihara seems to be acting a new part, as if his life itself partook of the theater. Yet in Kishida's own view, in this day and age one wonders less about the person called *haikara*; rather one becomes curious about the identifications, the projections, of the man who calls him by that term. It is Susumu's and Makiko's position that is the real focus of interest of the play. Susumu perceives Nishihara as having entered a higher plane, one that brings with it both theatrical and political activity.

Later in the first act, Susumu invites Yorie to accompany him to Nishihara's theater, and when she assents, he says: "Ms. Takao, you have brought something extremely precious (*tōtoi*)—something like a light into our lives" (171). With the prospect of going to the theater with Yorie, it seems to him that their world has ever so slightly opened. The "precious" new light partakes of the higher plane from which Nishihara brings tidings; yet Susumu immediately turns his pleasure over this opening of friendship back to the

7 "There is the newcomer, then. He no longer understands the dialect, he talks about the Opéra, which he may never have seen except from a distance, but above all he adopts a critical attitude toward his compatriots. Confronted with the most trivial occurrence, he becomes an oracle. He is the one who knows. He betrays himself in his speech.... Everyone immediately waits for the newcomer to speak." (FANON 1967:24)

question of marital status, asking Yorie about her husband. This talk of marriage marks long, awkward silences in their dialogue, punctuated by its numerous pauses. Yorie wears Western clothes, works outside the home, and has left her husband when the marriage did not go well. She speaks frankly and optimistically, and is open to new ideas, while at the same time fulfilling her familial duties to her mother. Yorie sees Makiko as trapped in her caring for the needs of Susumu, and she advises Susumu to "let [Makiko] free." He is baffled by the idea that he could be holding Makiko back, and claims that if she wanted to marry he would certainly "endure any hardship, make any sacrifice." Yorie retorts, laughing: "But of course. You cannot even call that a sacrifice." (Such familial responsibility need not be stated; it should be assumed.) Her laughter contrasts with his seriousness and overbearing concern for Makiko (185–186). He and Makiko are constrained in their actions by their very understanding of the necessity, the propriety of marriage. The desperation and nervousness with which Susumu and Makiko cling to their newfound friendships with Yorie and Nishihara in the end drive the two away from them toward each other.

In one of his many journalistic essays, published on May 10, 1928, Kishida recalls his impressions of a performance of Ibsen's *A Doll's House* that he saw during his sojourn in Paris. His interpretation of actress Suzanne Duprès' Nora is illuminating here: the actress' thin body seemed truly like a doll in relation to the looming figure of Torvald, and she appeared to Kishida as the embodiment of the "beautiful suffering woman" (or, the woman whom suffering made beautiful). Rather than representing the awakening or enlightened housewife (*mezametaru fujin*)—an important element that gave Ibsen's work its critical feminist edge—Kishida saw this performance as another incarnation of "the eternal feminine" (*eien no josei*), or, to add slightly to his words, the eternal suffering feminine (Kishida 1989, vol. 21:63). Like his earlier description of *haikara* as transcendent, this view of the eternal suffering beauty of Nora moves to decontextualize (and tame) the more radical perception and demystification implicit in Ibsen's work. Yet the insights evoked in *Onshitsu no mae* undermine and add complexity to Kishida's depoliticizing stance in his writings about Duprès' Nora.

In act II, Nakahara claims that during his trip he had a post card of a French actress who reminded him very much of Makiko, and that he meant to send it to her. Nakahara then invites Makiko to act in his plays, but she refuses, claiming that people would laugh at her. "If I went out on stage, I

would go weak at the knees [my legs would freeze] (180)." (He retorts that she could play the role of someone who goes weak at the knees, but eventually he gives up. Later in act II, Susumu brings a makeup kit to Makiko, and advises her to "be more like Yorie." Both Susumu and Nishihara seem to want her to abandon her silent, serious manner and become an outward-looking, *haikara* modern woman. When she receives the makeup, Makiko spends a long time looking in the mirror, as though she is caught between two images of herself, or uncertain which face she should wear. In the second act, she is transformed: she looks young and cheerful as she faces Nishihara. The moment of hope is short-lived: by the third act (according to the stage directions), she is back to being the "woman of unstriking appearance" who began the play.

One might go so far as to recall the prominence of the role of legs in the media images of the modern girl, such as Kataoka Teppei's analysis that "the legs of the Modern Girl were a product of the ability of the human spirit to shape the human form; her legs symbolized the Modern Girl's growing ability to create a new life for woman."[8] The contrast between Yorie's and Makiko's legs seems almost a literal expression of this figure. Yorie, when invited to act in Nishihara's plays, is also afraid that her legs might buckle on stage, but nonetheless decides to make an attempt, and ultimately she succeeds.

In this play, the position of those who stand in the place reserved for the *haikara* is multivalent, ambivalent, resistant to definition or confinement by categories. It is from the point of view of the one who *names* them as *haikara,* the space of the desire and projection of Susumu and Makiko (alternately jealous and terrified of change) that the meaning of the *haikara* becomes most clear. For the desiring viewer, Nishihara and Yorie represent access to the outside world, optimism toward the future, and the possibility of acting toward positive change. It is this moment of contact of the closed domestic world (of the greenhouse) with something outside of it, with the spectre or promise of the *haikara* world, that interests Kishida most. Yet this encounter, as I argued earlier, is also a missed encounter. At one point in the play Susumu describes going out to an event to which he has been invited, and ultimately returning without showing his face at the door. Invited out, Makiko and Susumu have the potential to leave their enclosed world, and

8 Cited in SILVERBERG 1991:242.

yet they decide that they would prefer to stay where they are or conclude that they have no other choice. Those moments of decision, the poised moments of open possibility combined with self-reflection, are marked throughout the play by numerous pauses, pauses which also come to have the function of reimposing the unspoken restriction in possibility, the resigned sadness or accepting despair. The awkwardness of these pauses within the smooth, flowing conventions of social exchange communicate to the interlocutor and the audience the difficulty of moving forward or even continuing to speak.

Ambivalent movement toward the future

Although Kishida himself speaks of an "eternal" rather than an "awakened" femininity, and of a universal rather than historically and contextually specific notion of *haikara*, his play enacts and subtly performs the conflict between these poles, and reveals the dynamic struggle between transformation and stasis.

The problem of change and stasis here is linked to the contradictory pulls of evolving cultural definitions. If one were to consider this struggle in the larger context of the *shingeki* and proletarian theater movements, one would note that these spheres are themselves in the process of negotiating such cultural boundaries, the impact of elements from Europe, and Japanese self-perceptions in relation to these new elements. In the wake of the great earthquake, new ordinances made possible the building of the Tsukiji little theater, which brought large numbers of European plays to the Tōkyō stage. The spaces of the proletarian theaters Zen'eiza and Toranku gekijō, and later the Tsukijiza (that formed the basis for Kishida's founding of Bungakuza) were cosmopolitan spaces for new ideas, with links to Western theater forms that were subsequently challenged by the experimental theater movement in the postwar period. Their activities themselves might be defined as Kishida defined *haikara*, as the "intelligent departure from old customs" (*sōmeina katayaburi*). But, as we have seen in this play, the breaking of these customs (an act that was neither universal nor transcendent) also had an impact in the redefinition of women's roles in the domestic sphere, the views of women's activity outside the home, and in the ideology of marriage as a whole. Through the symbolic complexity of this play, we can begin to see the theatrical process of engaging and negotiating such definitions and views.

At the end of the play, Nishihara and Yorie have gone, and Susumu and Makiko are left alone.

> Susumu: Somehow, it seems that something big is about to happen.
>
> Makiko: Isn't something already happening?
>
> Susumu: I think so. If we hold still, just wait here, I feel that something will come. Don't you have that feeling?
>
> Makiko: Yes.
>
> Susumu: You feel it, don't you. It's strange isn't it. Could this be it?
>
> Makiko...
>
> Susumu: Tonight, let's stay up all night. Right here, let's just stay like this. Something will happen, I'm sure...
>
> Makiko: Let's not, I don't like that...
>
> ...
>
> Susumu: Well, then we should just sleep quietly. (Pause) Or if not, maybe we can sing out in a loud voice. (Pause). Neither of those will be easy. What should we do? ... (Pause) ... I guess there's nothing to do but just stay as we are.... Just hold still and stay as we are...
>
> Makiko [wipes away a tear.] (Kishida 1927b:202)

Caught between going to bed quietly and singing out in a loud voice, the two stay as they are, static. They stare at change, wait for it, and concentrate on it, in danger of smothering it with their gaze even as it appears. Like Makiko's legs on stage, such transformations seem to petrify when watched. The tears of Makiko mark the paralysis of domestic hope within a closed cultural frame, a dark space waiting for light, while at the same time they may also mark the vanishing of that very frame. Further research will elaborate more fully the interrelationships between the space of the theater in early Shōwa Japan and the subjective process of desire, identification, and hope that these works reveal. As one example of this process, *Onshitsu no mae* illuminates the ambivalent views of these tidings of change, and the negotiations and transactions between a gradually essentialized past and the projection of possibilities for a transformed future.

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