

# Describing Reality: Murano Shirô and Modern Japan

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## Introduction

The culturally chaotic period of the 1920s was known as the *Les années folles* (the years of madness): novelists in the 1920s and 1930s were described as the Lost Generation by Gertrude Stein (1874-1946) in France. Similar to the situation in France, there were also novelists who participated in the cultural movement called Modernist in Japan. From artists who created the Japanese equivalent of modernism with their *Shinkankaku-ha* (the New Sensationalist<sup>1</sup>) movement to the avant-garde *Mavo*<sup>2</sup>, writers voluntarily accepted influences from western literature and this was reflected in their artistic works. As this cultural trend met the needs of the times, it is essential to reference social changes in the interwar period in order to comprehend and theorize these new movements. The search for new literary expression was ultimately a search for a new norm in Modern Japan.

After the Meiji Restoration (1868), Japanese intellectuals sought for a new intellectual and literary beginning in Western literature in order to establish a new modern Japanese language, which would be necessary for a new modernizing Japanese state<sup>3</sup>. Murano Shirô (1901-1975) was one of those young people who pondered the question of how to create a life appropriate to this new world. Like other Modernist artists, he chose one of the Modernist movements, the *Neue Sachlichkeit* (New Objectivity) movement, imported from the West, as his standard bearer. Japanese Modernist novelists took Western literature as the template of a new modernizing (westernizing) society and in hindsight this appears to have been a most appropriate choice. In the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, as in the rest of the world, Japanese youth were attracted to three cultural movements: the Naturalist, Modernist and Proletarian movements. Each of them has different characteristics; to portray human beings without any beautification, to oppose the previous generation

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and expose the ugliness in Capitalist society. Yet there is something they have in common, that is to say, influences from Western culture and this reveals how post Meiji Restoration society had become westernized even in the cultural field. Unlike other artistic movements, the Modernist movement had no dominant ideology and mostly focused on the problem of expression. Young Japanese people found abundant descriptions of modern elements and foreign cultures in Paul Morand<sup>4</sup> (French Modernist author, 1888-1976)'s works, which were like encyclopedias of modernity. In this context, Modernist authors looked for literary expression appropriate to the new society that emerged after the long reign of the Tokugawa government. The New Objectivity that Murano employed is extreme in its use of language that attempts to describe things objectively, avoiding any bias. Actually this movement was in favor of photography. In this paper, I will analyze poetry works by Murano before and after the Second World War and clarify the motive behind his writing.

The New Objectivity movement started in Germany after the First World War in the 1920s in the fields of painting, literature, theatre and music. Like other Modernist movements, this group of artists opposed the dominant movement of the previous order, which was expressionism (Wada 2010: 1049-1050). This artistic ideal tried to subjectively describe the unstable society of the modern era. New Objectivity came to Japan around the late 1920s and there were several theoretical discussions about the movement, such as Takeda Chûya's book *Neue Sachlichkeit bungaku ron* (The New Objectivity Literature, 1931). Murano was one of those who actively introduced this movement to the literary world. The *Nihon kindai bungaku daijiten* (The Encyclopedia of Modern Japanese Literature) defines 'New Objectivity' as a cultural movement opposed to Expressionism, which attempted to show a new style of objectifying things (Nihon Kindai Bungaku Kan 1977: 236). On the other hand, according to *The Oxford English Dictionary*, 'modernism' means a '[...] mode of expression, or peculiarity of style of workmanship, characteristic of modern times.' (*The Oxford English Dictionary IX. 2<sup>nd</sup> edition*. 1989: 948). We cannot find much difference between this definition and other Modernist movements, both pursued a new mode of expression to describe the reality of modern times particularly in the 1920s and 1930s. Modernist writers experienced the same social changes: Capitalism, Consumerism, urban life, the mass destruction caused by the First World War, and it is easy to imagine that even with differences in their expression all Modernist movements possessed a similar nature. And the nature of the Japanese language they utilized in their works became the basis of the modern Japanese language — a significant moment for contemporary Japanese culture. Thus analyzing individuals helps us to understand the whole Modernist movement. Murano attempted to establish New Objectivity in Japanese literature and his activities acquired a large readership, therefore to some extent Japanese New

Objectivity developed around the poet Murano Shirô. As Wada Hirofumi noted, the New Objectivity is recognized as part of the variety of Modernist movements that emerged in modern urban areas in the 1930s in Japan (Wada 2010: 1050). We need to understand that the New Objectivity is part of the larger Modernist movement.

Apparently being objective was Murano's life-long literary aim. In this paper, we will look at the changes in his literary themes before and after the war. Murano did not change his poetic principles, but the reality he portrayed certainly changed after the war. Not following a strong ideology, he depicted a life itself objectively; in his works readers can get to know an objective portrait of the generation experiencing this turbulent century. Behind most Modernist works, there are always questions hidden: 'What is modern Japan?', 'Who are the modern Japanese?' and 'What is Japanese modern culture?'. Seeking his answers to these questions before and after the war, through analysis of his poetry, is also an important issue in this paper. After the Meiji Restoration, Japanese intellectuals suffered from the impact from the Western culture and as a result, attempted to fit the West and its culture into a highly modernized (westernized) society. Experiencing two wars, under the American occupation, Japanese intellectuals were required to answer the questions raised above once more. Suggesting a model for modern Japan was always one of the demands from readers.

Murano struggled to differentiate his literary style from other Modernist authors, however the society that he described was same as the other authors attempted to portray in their works. Although Modernist writers employed quite unique and sometimes incomprehensible modes of expression, the themes in their works are not much different from older ones: how to live their life and to create a model for the future. Modernist writers abandoned the Japanese traditional writing style, because they thought there would be better way to describe society which was completely different from the previous one in terms of its lifestyle. By closely reading each work of Modernist literature, readers can find both fear and the struggle to live, and also the excitement for the new era. Therefore, we can conclude that the Modernist writers' choices in their styles and themes were suited to the new society of the 1920s and 1930s and that is what the readers looked forward to reading.

Through a comparison of Murano's literary themes before and after the war, this paper will clarify readers' demands for poetry in each period and how he responded to these demands. And it will give us hints to the answer to larger questions: 'What kind of society is modern Japan?' and 'What is modern Japanese literature?'

## New Objectivity in the Interwar Period and the Post-War Environment

Murano Shirô was born in Tokyo in 1901 (Meiji 34). As he was a member of almost the last generation of those who remembered the Meiji era, it is assumed that he was influenced by the Edo period and also was inspired by Western literature in his literary activities as were other Modernist authors.

As a poet, Murano was very active and always located himself in the center of Modernist movements (participating in establishment of several magazines: *Shinsokubutsusei bungaku* (The New Objectivity Literature), *Shihô* (The Way of Poetry), *Shinryôdo* (The New Territory), *Shinshiron* (the New Poetics), *GALA* and *Mugen* (Eternity) (Murano 1962: 232). And *Sudachi no uta* (A Song for Leaving the Nest, Murano wrote the lyric for it) is often sang at school. Even though Murano's works still draw attention, a detailed analysis on the relationship between his representative poetry book, *Taisô shishû* (Gymnastic Poetry, 1939), and later works has not been completed. This volume consists of poems and photographs of gymnasts, which are treating sport and the beauty of the human body. The sports photos were taken by the German film director, Leni Riefenstahl (1902-2003) and also the photographer, Paul Wolff (1887-1951). *Gymnastic Poetry* combines several different modes of production as a poetry book, a photography book and a political tract.

Like other Modernist authors, Murano Shirô experienced the First World War (1914-1918), the Great Kantô Earthquake (1923) in his youth and read Western literature. In the domain of prose, the New Sensationalist school was the leading group in Japanese Modernism; on the other hand, according to Murano, *Shi to shiron* (Poetry and Poetics)<sup>5</sup> served as one of the representatives of Modernist poetry. This journal was launched to liberate the poetic world from the yoke and pressure of the previous social and political schools of thought (Murano 1962: 2). This remark reminds us of the New Sensationalist school. Kawabata Yasunari wrote 'Certainly we expect *Bungeijidai* [the Literary Age] will make a breakthrough in current stagnant literary circles. [...] But we got together in this journal to break the deadlock in our life and art. (Kawabata 1967 [1924]: 7)'. It shows us as members of the younger generation, Modernist authors required literature to exhibit a model for a new modern human being, modern lifestyle and modern thought, and I assume that Murano shared that ideal.

In contrast to the high popularity of Modernism in the 1920s and 1930s, the activities of the New Objectivists were gradually forgotten in the postwar world because of the shock defeat in the Second World War. Murano noted that Japanese poets experienced the same situation as prose writers: some poets stopped

composing poems and others were still passionate in support of their creative activities. Yet, the shock of the war implanted new poetic thought in a new generation, which was a voice of humanity in the ruined reality after the war (Murano 1962: 5). As for Murano himself, he actively played an important role in post-war Japanese poetry as not only a poet but also a brilliant critic.

There is an interesting attempt by Murano Shirô himself to evaluate his own poetry in his book *Kanshō gendaishi III: Shōwa* (Views on Modern Poetry III: Shōwa Period) in 1962. Murano analyzed several representative poets in this work, he chose to list himself among the other writers. As Kusumoto Kenkichi commented (Murano 1967: 195 [Kusumoto's commentary]), Murano was a great critic of poetry, and his excellent analyses on modern poetry give readers clear explanations. Although most modernist writers lost themselves in the confusion of literary theory while briskly practicing modernist modes of expression, Murano defined his literary thought concretely, his statements were very clear and declared that he completely understood the poet known as Murano Shirô. Murano objectively categorized his own works mentioning writers he was inspired by, such as Rainer Maria Rilke (1875-1926) and Martin Heidegger (1889-1976), and his comments on his own literary career tell us that his interests gradually moved from an objective description of things to the vanity of life in postwar Japanese society (Murano 1962: 233-246). However such a negative view of the mechanized and inhuman aspects of modern society was already one of the central issues before the war, as Proletarian authors wrote in their works. Modernist authors perceived cultural and social chaos as the transition to a better future for literature.

Although Murano was under influence of New Objectivity throughout his career, he ultimately did not reach any theoretical conclusions. As Kikuta Mamoru observed (Kikuta 1978: 17), no one denies that Murano started his literary career with the publication of his second poetry book, *Gymnastic Poetry* in 1939. This book is regarded as an experimental attempt at 'New Objectivity'. We can see how Murano defined this movement in his essay, 'Keishiki ni kansuru danpen' [On Style] in 1931. Murano kept his distance from Surrealism and pointed out advantages that Japanese poets are able to gain from New Objectivity. For Proletarian authors New Objectivity created journalistic and social perspectives which matched the times and helped them describe society objectively. And for people who looked for a new way of representing reality (Modernist writers), the movement gave them an inspiration: a fearsome beauty in poetry (Murano 2010b [1931]: 260). Yet some other authors such as Takeda Chûya tried to define the movement, but there are no concrete definitions of this movement as in the case of other modernist movements. They just held to a single principle, that is to say, to go against the previous generation and tradition, and suggest a new model of modern life and modern human beings.

Modernist movements were called various names, one of the labels, the New Sensationalist school, was given to them by others and after being thus labelled they tried to establish their own theoretical basis. The essay above appeared in a Modernist journal, *Kajiki* (Swordfish), in February 1931 and six months later Murano published a poem, 'Taisô' (Gymnastic), in the same journal. The poem became a part of his volume *Gymnastic Poetry* eight years later in 1939. As Murano wrote in his essay of February 1931, he combined journalistic and also the social perspectives and sublime beauty of writing in this book.

Readers can learn from the several personae representing young Japanese in *Gymnastic Poetry*. There are two important issues in regard to this poetry book. First of all, *Gymnastic Poetry* altered the conceptual base of Japanese poetry and slipped it into another genre: photography. In regard to New Objectivity, Murano attempted to eliminate his own perspectives and focus on physical beauty alone in *Gymnastic Poetry*, though readers can find young people's voices in this work. Murano once wrote that one poet criticized his work—there is no description of life in his poetry (Murano 2010a[1929]: 84). The poet did not mention whether the 'life' is Murano's own or others'. I argue that he tried to avoid exposing himself and his life in his literature.

Secondly, there is the question of why Murano chose photos taken by Leni Riefenstahl, who was famous as the director of a documentary film on the Berlin Olympics (1936). The Games were held under the aegis of the Fascist German government and her film was an exercise in propaganda to show Germany's power to the world. In the introduction to *Gymnastic Poetry*, Murano wrote that to perfect his ideal in the poetry book (to establish the expression of New Objectivity), he used their photos (Murano 2004: 2). This tells us that he had no other intention than to emphasize the poetic impression of these poems. Though it is true that he wrote several examples of patriotic poetry, as other poets did during wartime. In terms of literary direction, Murano Kôichi, Shirô's son, questioned Shirô's intentions as to his patriotic poetry (Murano Kôichi 2000: 115-116). On the other hand, Abe Takeshi severely criticized Murano's literary activities during wartime, arguing that it was part of the destruction of Avant Garde poetry (Abe 1980: 135-146). Wada Hirofumi explained that the Modernist version of New Objectivity blossomed in *Gymnastic Poetry* and their nationalism was expressed by Takeda Chûya's *Kokubô kokka* (National Defense and Nation, 1940) (Wada 2010: 1059). Murano expressed his gratitude to Riefenstahl and Wolff in the introduction to *Gymnastic Poetry* (Murano 2004: 2). Riefenstahl was arrested after the Second World War because of her collaboration with the Fascist German government. By employing her photos, this poetry book is naturally regarded as a piece of Fascist propaganda. However Wada wrote that Murano chose photos of Germans because he attempted to separate his

poems from Japanese nationalism (Wada 1990: 51). There are 16 photos (including the cover photo) of Germans, who are playing sports, in this book. Every two facing pages deal with same topic. For example, a poem about the hammer throw is on the right page and another photo of the hammer throw is on the left page. Nonetheless four poems, including 'Racing' and 'Swedish Ladder', do not accompany photos on the pages. Since readers see poems and photos at the same time, they recognize these poems are about the beauty of the German body, not the Japanese body. Actually not a few Modernist writers showed their patriotic feelings in their works *e.g.* Yokomitsu Riichi and Paul Morand. Considering their starting point of opposing existing society and its traditions, the change of attitude seems odd to us.

After the Second World War, Murano enthusiastically published his poetry and his brilliant and sharp essays on poetry also appeared. It is obvious that he is one of the leading authors in poetry circles in the post war period. Most Modernist authors who were quite active and popular in the interwar period disappeared after the war, and most Modernist writers changed their literary interests. Nevertheless, Murano did not waver in his fascination with objective expression after the war and his theme of describing social reality did not change either. In regard to the reality itself of Japanese society, it had changed through the Meiji Restoration, two world wars and under postwar reconstruction. However the search for the definition of Japanese modern culture and Japanese modern values had still continued through these social changes. To this extent, what readers required of literature did not much change before and after the war.

Kikuta Mamoru titled his book on Murano Shirô (*Bôyô no hito* [A Person As If A Lost Sheep]) after Murano's poetry book, *Bôyôki* (A Record of A Lost Sheep), it is obvious that this book is Murano's biggest success after the war. Kikuta mentioned that Murano was influenced by New Objectivity in its expression and received rhetorical advice from Heidegger's ontology (Kikuta 1978: 97). As a 20<sup>th</sup> century intellectual Murano naturally paid attention to this great philosopher (he cited Heidegger in afterword of *A Record of A Lost Sheep* [Murano 1959: 110]), yet he did not discuss his rhetorical source in depth compared to the degree that he wrote on expression in New Objectivity. I argue that *Gymnastic Poetry* focused more on its mode of expression and that *A Record of A Lost Sheep* can be regarded more as a reflection of Murano's literary themes without any experimental devices. In the afterword of *A Record of A Lost Sheep*, Murano wrote of his poetics: 'People used to warn me that "At this literary precipice, there is only the perspective of nihilism left for you.'" In regard to nihilism, in this deepening night in the world, nothing is left but despair. But I would like to answer: "I can never be a decadent nihilist. If I seem to have lost my literary themes, it is solely because of my anarchic attitude. I confirm my life and where I stand by my attitudes and I am always prepared to dive

into reality.” (Murano 1959: 109) Murano did not go straight into nihilism, even though Modernist movements started from opposing the previous generation, Modernist writers concentrated on establishing a new literature which could take the lead over Japanese literary society and ultimately society itself. After the Great Kantô Earthquake, the older generation despaired in the face of the ruined Kantô area; the new generation decided to create a new culture and values from nothing. The Japanese Modernist movement blossomed especially after the earthquake; in this context, the Japanese Modernist movement possessed a very positive motive to launch their activity. Murano was born and raised in Tokyo, it is valid to assume that he also shared this feeling as part of the young generation. However his works after the war did not continue to have this bright side because of the shock of the war. Murano did not give up on Modernist theory in the postwar period. He wrote an essay entitled ‘Shinsokubutsu shugi no saishuppatsu’ (Restart of the New Objectivity), which was published in *Yokan* (Foresight) in 1948 (Murano 1986: 86-92). He criticized aspects of ‘New Objectivity’ before the war as superficially adopting a kind of journalistic role (Murano 1986: 90). And he questioned what New Objectivity could do in the chaos of postwar society, and his answer was ‘We can foresee several literary aspects based on the ontological perspective lying in the bottom of literary morality.’ (Murano 1986: 91). He insisted that life which automatically reminded us of death would be the appropriate theme for New Objectivity, alluding to Heidegger and Sartre (Murano 1986: 91-92). Theoretically, Murano’s New Objectivity reached its breaking point by abolishing its experimental style. However Murano’s poetry in the post war period exposed his poetry’s real nature, undisturbed by the unique expression of New Objectivity.

### *Gymnastic Poetry* in the Interwar Period

*Gymnastic Poetry* consists of 19 poems: ‘Taisô’ (Gymnastics), ‘Tetsuarei’ (Dumbbells), ‘Tettsuinage’ (Hammer Throw), ‘Tsuruiwa’ (Rings), ‘Tetsubô’ (Horizontal Bar), ‘Kôshôgai’ (Hurdling), ‘Buranko’ (Swing), ‘Bôtakatobi’ (Pole Vault), ‘Tohan’ (Climbing), ‘Sukii’ (Skiing), ‘Tobikomi’ (Diving), ‘Fûpu’ (Hoop), ‘Kentô’ (Boxing), ‘Yarinage’ (Javelin Throw), ‘Kyôsô’ (Racing) and ‘Rokuboku’ (Wall Bars). Japanese traditional sports such as Jûdô did not form one of the themes of this book. Because of that, Wada Hirofumi declared that Murano’s intention behind the publication was mainly to establish New Objectivity (Wada 1990: 52). Murano wrote in his introduction to the book that: ‘Today, there is no reason that we poets should be hysterical. (Murano 2004: 2)’ It is apparent that Murano attempted to achieve a certain level of New Objectivity style in this work. However the reality of what Murano described is the reality experienced by the young Japanese generation; it is inevitable that we hear the voice of the young generation in the poetry in this volume.



Most of the poems in *Gymnastic Poetry* take a first-person narrative and as Hikita Masaaki indicates, this narrative opposes the essential role of poetry in which the narrator portrays the scenery around him/her (Hikita 2002: 35). In fact, the perspective of the poetry does not start from the narrator, the narrator is a generalized human being and the poetry shows us a generalized perspective in time. It is valid to say that we can regard the narrator, Boku (I)<sup>6</sup>, as the voice of the young people conjured up by Murano Shirô.

Two poems on diving appear in *Gymnastic Poetry*. The second one is below:

Tobikomi

Boku wa shiroi kumo no naka kara aruite kuru  
Ichimai no kyori no hashi made  
Ôkiku boku wa soru  
Jikan ga soko e shiwa yoru  
Keru boku wa ketta  
Sude ni sora no naka da  
Sora ga boku wo daki tomeru  
Sora ni kakaru kin'niku

Daga datsuraku suru  
Owarete kite tsuki sasaru  
Boku wa tômei na shokkaku no naka de mogaku  
Atama no ue no awa no soto ni  
On'na tachi no emi ya koshi ga mieru  
Boku wa akai kaigangasa no  
Ôkii shima wo tsukamou to aseru  
(Murano 2004: 30-31)

Diving

I come walking out from inside a white cloud,  
out to the tip of one board's length.  
I bend over very far.  
Time gets wrinkled up to there.  
Kick! I have kicked.  
Inside the sky already!  
The sky continues holding me.  
Muscles are hooked to the sky,

but they fall off.  
Chased, pierced!  
I struggle inside a sensation of transparency.  
Outside the bubbles above my head  
women's laughter and waists appear.  
A red beach umbrella's  
big stripes I hurry to grab.  
(Shiffert & Sawa 1972: 87)

Murano introduced Kagiya Yukinobu's analysis on Murano's poetry as Murano was interested in Rilke's existentialism. And then Murano insisted he learned how to 'observe' things and learn the meaning and values hidden behind them. However Murano confessed to his limitations in theory and what he pursued was to describe the real world plainly (Murano 1962: 234). Like other Modernist writers, the New Sensationalist writers, Murano did not reach a certain rhetorical achievement but focused mainly on expression. Murano did not give any detailed comments on 'Diving', other than noting the publication of this experimental work reveals the birth of a modern poetry (Murano 1962: 237).

As the title indicates, the volume is dedicated to portraying the beauty of the human body playing sports, however Murano wrote some poems which do not relate to physical beauty, such as 'Kyôshô' (Racing) and 'Rokuboku' (Wall Bars) which appear at the end of this volume:

Kyôshô

Anata wa fushigi da  
Anata no mune no nambaa wa  
Subayaku kûkan wo ikisugita  
Ô ichimai no sokuryoku datta

Daga ima anata wa  
Waratte boku to akushu wo suru  
Anata niwa mô sokuryoku ga naku  
Kotoba wa domori  
Shisô no taworu wo kata kara tarashite iru  
(Murano 2004: 38)

Racing

You are so mysterious.

A player's number on your chest  
Passing over at full speed  
Oh, it is a speed coloured in white

However you  
Shaking hands with me.  
You do not have any speed.  
You speak in a faltering voice.  
You hang a towel named 'ideology' over your shoulder.<sup>7</sup>

It is valid to say that Murano purposely did not add any photos to the 'Racing'. As Hikita indicates, some researchers state that Murano attempted to write about the ideological confusion in Japanese literary society (Hikita 2002: 44). In 'Racing', we can assume that Murano believed that writers focused on ideology, not on the art of writing, as he writes: 'You speak in a faltering voice/ You hang a towel named 'ideology' over your shoulder.' In fact holding a certain ideology narrows person's perspective, and that is what the most Modernist authors were afraid of. Modernist writers' works are sometimes criticized that there is no deep insight and various metaphors and images let readers misunderstand their text. One of the representative Modernist groups, the New Sensationalist school's works give us several hints as to how to understand 'Racing'<sup>8</sup>. They started their journal to establish a new literature, however they never concretely defined what the new literature was. There was always the previous generation and what they had not created was 'a new literature'<sup>9</sup>. From this point of view, Murano's objectivity always reminds us of something which is not 'objective'. After the Meiji Restoration in 1868, Japanese authors gained a new mode of expression to describe the world in their own way, liberated from traditional writing styles, and influenced by Western literature. Mizumura Minae insists on how much authors in Meiji, Taishō and early Shōwa made efforts to build their own unique style, which is the basis of contemporary the Japanese language (Mizumura 2008). Through this poem, it is valid to assume that Murano warned readers not be trapped by ideology which could blind their eyes to this original use of language.

Murano already alerted readers about ideology 10 years prior to the publication of *Gymnastic Poetry*:

Ideology does not have anything to do with poetry. It is a big mistake to think that poetry is born from ideology. And if you think that you can write poems with ideology, that is another big mistake. Poetry is not born from ideology, it is born directly from life. Those who can write poems are just skilled as poets. In this point, Nakagawa Yoichi's thoughts on literary style

suggest to us a clear standard. (Murano 2010a [1929]: 84)

According to Wada Hirofumi, Murano started to get interested in New Objectivity around 1930 (Wada 2010: 1057). This essay was just written around this time. Murano wrote that New Objectivity started opposing Expressionism and Romanticism which posited 'Expanded Selfnessness' (Murano 1954: 227). By his first-person narrative and from the last two poems, we can assume that Murano himself questioned the achievement that he could get from the combination of poetry and photography. We need to pay attention to Murano's words: 'Poetry is born directly from life.' From his allergy to Expressionism and Romanticism, 'life' does not refer to 'his life', but 'others' lives'. From this point of view, 'Diving' implies a different meaning. The people who led Japanese literary society now turn their backs on real society and indulge in 'ideology'. Their words based on 'ideology' are not comprehensible to readers anymore. It is obvious that Murano assumed that the society they saw through 'ideology' did not portray the reality in Japan. Murano tried to generalize Japanese reality and put this into his poetry. In 'Diving', readers can see the beauty of the human body and the swimmer's vivid and dreamy feeling in the sky before falling down. And readers understand his expectations, for what he will be able to see when he leaves the water. The 'Boku (I)' and 'Anata (You)' do not have a name as they just represent the 'Japanese'.

Murano looked forward to the future of photography in his essay: 'Geijutsu shashin no naimen' (Inside Artistic Photography) in June 1939 (six months earlier than the publication of *Gymnastic Poetry*). He insisted that 'Artistic Photography' needs 'A new realism': A new realism is a new objectivity, outwardness, and a new object. Just a mere copy of a reality does not belong to the field of art as there is no originality (Murano 2001 [1939]: 369). To perfect New Objectivity, photography is the best help for poets, though the last two poems in *Gymnastic Poetry* show us Murano's despair of the limitations of photography and what photography is not capable of expressing.

### *A Record of A Lost Sheep* in the Postwar Period

*Bôyôki* (*A Record of A Lost Sheep*) was published in 1959 and received the Yomiuri Bungaku Shô (Yomiuri Prize for Literature). The most representative work of Murano's early career is definitely *Gymnastic Poetry*, and we can suggest *A Record of A Lost Sheep* is the outstanding work of his later career (Kikuta 1978: 119). This poetry book is composed of 41 poems. Many fine poems are included in this book: this paper focuses on those that most attract readers. *Gymnastic Poetry* and *A Record of A Lost Sheep* have a 20 years time lag. Kusumoto Kenkichi noted that from the wartime to the postwar period, Murano's poetry rapidly became

pessimistic. Murano's way of defining 'life' by the existence of 'death' drove his literature in terms of its theory and expression, and this is also the destination of his poetry after the war. His poetics was refined and produced a perfected logic. And the change let him build up his own style of writing which reminds us of the wanderer (Murano 1967: 202-203 [Kusumoto's commentary]). Therefore readers can see Murano's culminating achievement as a poet in this volume.

One of his most famous poems in *A Record of A Lost Sheep* is 'Shika' (Deer), as it appeared in school textbooks:

### Shika

Shika wa mori no hazure no  
Yûhi no naka ni jitto tatte ita  
Kare wa shitte ita  
Chiisai hitai ga nerawarete iru nowo  
Keredomo kare ni  
Dôsuru koto ga dekita darou  
Kare wa sun'nari tatte  
Mura no hôwo miteita  
Ikiru jikan ga ôgon no yôni hikaru  
Kare no sumika de aru  
Ôkii mori no yoru wo haikai ni shite  
(Murano 1959: 16-17)

### A Deer

At the edge of a forest a deer  
In the setting sun stood still  
He knew  
His small forehead was a target  
But he  
Could do nothing about it  
He stood erect  
Looking toward the village  
His remaining time shone like gold  
Against the vast night of his forest home  
At his back  
(Morton 1994: 15)

The moment the deer exists suddenly switches to the precious moment of life when

it is in danger. Murano wrote himself that this poem describes the moment when his life ceases and the deer has also a stuporous look leading to ‘emptiness’ (Murano 1962: 245). Itô Shinkichi highly evaluated this work’s aesthetics. He insisted that life is about to be replaced by death and the moment is terribly cruel, however the beauty of this moment permeates this poem (Murano 1961: 220 [Itô’s commentary]). There are several analyses that focus mainly on the expression, yet Murano Kôichi mentioned the model of this deer is his mother (Murano Shirô’s wife) and the plot is based on a real incident (Murano Kôichi 2000: 175). As objectifying things is an inevitable process for Murano, there is always something which can be his motif in real life. He described a new modernized society before the war, thus I argue that we can see Murano’s objective portrait of postwar society in this volume, such as with ‘Seishun no sakana’ (A Fish in Youth):

Seishun no sakana

Era kara chi wo nagashite  
Hikiage rarete kuru made wa  
Anata wa sakana dewa nakatta

Mono iitage na me ga  
Mori ya sora wo utsusu soshite  
Chiisana keiren ga  
O ya hire wo hashiri nukeru to  
Hajimete shi ga anata wo sakanakusaku shita

Eigô no kanata kara  
Chiisai koe de “Sakana yo” to yobareru  
Sono henpei na katachi wa  
Ittai nani ka

Yagate wa konoha no yôni  
Hone no ryôgawa ni hirakareta ga  
Soko niwa kioku mo kotoba mo nakute  
Goku shôryô no kusatta mono ga  
Hanayome no te wo namagusaku shita  
(Murano 1959: 14-15)

A Fish in Youth

Blooding through gills  
Pulled out of the water

Until then, you were not a fish.

Your wistful eyes  
Reflect wood and sky, and then  
A little cramp goes  
Through your tail and fins  
And you first smell like a fish after death.

Beyond eternity,  
Small voice calling you 'a fish'.  
Your now flat body  
What does it mean?

Eventually like a leaf,  
Your flesh and bones are opened to both sides.  
There is no memory nor words.  
Something rotten in you  
makes a new bride's hands smell fishy.<sup>10</sup>

As with life and death in 'A Deer', the language in this poem presents us with opposing values: a fish as animal and food. Murano wrote that a youthful groom before marriage is identified as a fish in water and his life is in his bride's hands after marriage (Murano 1962: 243). It is noteworthy that a name, 'sakana' (fish), is given to the dead fish, and it turns out that a live fish is not a fish (sakana) in this sense. This concept refers to a human-centered society, and even humans (the groom) are controlled by others (the bride). It is obviously useful to be a 'sakana' for a human and it suggests that the man would be useful in society by marriage becoming a husband and father. However the usefulness of 'sakana' started from its death and after the marriage the groom started walking towards death instead of reaching the climax of his life. Murano points out '[...] Death comes at the end of everything and life is unsubstantial. Yet how sad it is that only death can define life.' (Murano 1962: 243). In addition to the substantial questions of life and death, despair towards Capitalist society, which ruled the world after the war, exists in this poetry. Everything, even human beings, must be useful in this consumer society. Death does not define life; rather usefulness or wealth defines it. Actually that is the world Murano was afraid to confront before the war. Murano wrote 'After two wars which made everyone miserable, ideological anxiety and chaos have come. And in this confusion the two ideologies have an analogy. From attachment or interest to what are disrupted and also indefinable things, to longing for something which no one could deprive of. What people want to know is not the superficial layer which is continuously changing nor a chaotic lifestyle. What people want to know must be

something essential that does not relate to any categorization.’ (Murano 1986: 86). He wrote this essay in 1948 when the whole world became involved in the conflict between Capitalism and Communism.

In *A Record of A Lost Sheep*, there are no obvious journalistic implications nor is there the voice of the Japanese young generation that readers can find in *Gymnastic Poetry*. Nonetheless, there are more essential questions: seeking the meaning of life and a new perspective on life appear in this volume. Murano wrote in the afterword of *A Record of A Lost Sheep* ‘Today, the nature of human beings is in danger of collapsing and being buried. We cannot see poetry just as an expression of intelligence or emotion anymore, but as something through which humans could get fundamental support.’ (Murano 1959: 111). The vivid description of physical beauty and the appeal to readers which was partly journalistic in *Gymnastic Poetry* completely disappeared in *A Record of A Lost Sheep*. Murano’s New Objectivity reached a climax in *Gymnastic Poetry* in terms of its expression and theoretically entered a mature phase after the war, and his post-war writing style was established with the publication of *A Record of A Lost Sheep*.

## Conclusion

Although the Modernist Movement responded to the demands of the time, it did not last long, because of its ideological gaps and too experimental expression. Most Modernist authors such as members of the New Sensationalist school did not return to their work in the 1920s and 1930s and restarted their career after the war. However Murano Shirô reestablished New Objectivity in post-war society and built a different outcome from this theory which was accepted by readers. He is one of the few authors who continued to work towards Modernist movement after the war.

No one denies that to be objective was Murano’s life-time theme. Unlike other Modernist authors, Murano did not lose his career as a poet after the war. It is partly because of his standpoint describing reality itself. Although the leading Modernist group, the New Sensationalist School, was trapped by the use of abundant metaphors and images, Murano simply described people in each period. *Gymnastic Poetry* reveals a very experimental style of art, yet without photos accompanying the poems readers are still able to enjoy the book. The photos do not provide any additional benefits to this work judging from the evaluation prevailing now<sup>11</sup>. We can see more attention to social issues in *Gymnastic Poetry*. On the other hand, *A Record of A Lost Sheep* reflects the dismal atmosphere after the war, sadness is present throughout the work. The characters in *A Record of A Lost Sheep* refer more to people around Murano; they are not sports players with physical beauty, as in *Gymnastic Poetry*. By using the photos of Leni Riefenstahl, he cannot avoid criticism of his literary



attitudes during the war. Murano partly attempted to achieve a certain level of journalistic commentary on New Objectivity in *Gymnastic Poetry*. After seeing the post-war reality of the world, ruled by the two ideologies, he turned his back to the reality he refused to accept before the war. Although he was already interested in essential questions about life before the war, the change in post-war society accelerated his literary development. In other words, he realized that readers did not expect any journalistic role anymore because of the growth of journalism and the media, and found the role of poetry: which is to answer the meaning of life and how to live this life. Actually that is what humans have been expecting literature to answer for ages. 'Deer' appeared in several textbooks of Japanese literature for high school, thus his assumption was correct. Leaving aside what he did during the war, I argue that Murano was unique in his apprehension of the reality of Japanese society and answered the expectation of readers in his own way. This paper sheds light on significant and fundamental questions as to what modern Japanese society is in its essentials and attempts to formulate an answer to the question relating to a reevaluation of contemporary society arising out of the impact of Modernism on Japanese art and literature.

## Notes

1. A Japanese representative modernist group. Yokomitsu Riichi (1898-1947), Kawabata Yasunari (1899-1972) and others launched a literary journal, *Bungeijidai* (Literary Age), in 1924 in search for a new expressions and themes and soon were labeled as the 'New Sensationalists' by Chiba Kameo (Japanese critic, 1878-1935).
2. A Dadaist art group. Yanase Masamu (1900-1945), Murayama Tomoyoshi (1901-1977) and others started this group.
3. For discussion of the establishment of modern Japanese language and its relationship with modern Japanese literature, see Mizumura Minae's *Nihongo ga horobiru toki* [*The Fall of Language in the Age of English*] (2008).
4. Morand acquired high popularity in the 1920s and 1930s in Japan.
5. Published from 1928 to 1933.
6. However Murano used *Watashi* (I) when it first appeared. (Haga 1983: 98)
7. Translation was made by the author.
8. Murano did not join in the New Sensationalist school, though the nature of Modernism is worldwide and multifaceted and the result of that, Modernist groups were involved with each other on various levels such as Murano's analysis of Nakagawa Yoichi's novel. Nakagawa is one of the main members of the New Sensationalist school. (Murano, 'Chisei no taisô' [Gymnastics of

- Intelligence], *Kajiki* [Swordfish], 14, 494, 1932)
9. Consult Donald Keene's *Dawn to the West, vol.1* (1984) to know more about the New Sensationalist school and their literary origins.
  10. Translation was made by the author.
  11. Kusumoto insists that the combination of photos and poetry is due to the misguided intelligence of Modernism. (Murano 1967: 199 [Kusumoto's commentary])

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