The order had come out that morning that since the Emperor was going to make a speech over the radio, everyone not on duty was to listen...

“The broadcast today was an Imperial proclamation of the end of the war, sir.”

“What?” I shouted automatically, half-rising from my seat, with my hands on the table.

“It was an Imperial proclamation, sir, that the war is over.”

A queer shudder ran through me from head to foot. I felt my right hand on the table begin to tremble. I turned round and looked at C.P.O. Kira’s face. All expression had gone out of it, and I saw his lips tremble slightly as he tried to speak. He said nothing. He just collapsed onto his chair. I distinctly saw tears rolling down his thin cheeks...

Sitting before the table, C.P.O. Kira had drawn his sword from its scabbard. He brought the blade close to his face.... He was staring at it as if bewitched. There was an aura of ferocity about his whole body. In the slightly bent back, in the eyes, like those of a hungry animal, I saw a brutal will which was not of this world. I stood leaning on my bunk, my eyes fixed on him. A strange excitement set my whole body trembling. I was aware of the faint noise which my knees were making, knocking together. I stood there with eyes wide open while time went by, a ghastly time during which my blood seemed to freeze.

C.P.O. Kira moved. Guided by his hand, the blade, gleaming hypnotically, was put away in its scabbard. I heard the sword-guard strike the scabbard with a hard, clear sound. The sound went right through me. C.P.O. Kira altered his grip on the sword and stood up, looking at me all the time. And he spoke to me softly, in a pathetic voice. I did not budge as I listened to him.

“P.O. Murakami. I’ll go with you to the cipher room.”

As we left the dugout, the sea was bright with the reflection of the glow in the evening sky. The path disappeared into the fading dusk. C.P.O. Kira walked ahead of me....As I hurried along the stony path trying to keep up with C.P.O. Kira, scalding tears suddenly streamed from my eyes. Again and again I wiped them away, but they fell in an endless flow. The landscape, through my tears, became dis-
torted and disjointed. I clenched my teeth and walked on, fighting back the choking sensation which rose in my throat. My mind was a confused jumble of thoughts and nothing was clear anymore. I did not even know whether I was sad. Only, my eyes brimmed with tears, again and again. I covered my face with my hands and staggered on step by step down the path.


Michel Foucault begins his exploration of the history of modern “discipline” with the image of the soldier’s body. Whereas in the seventeenth century a soldier was born, not made, and became a soldier because of specific bodily characteristics, he explains,

By the late eighteenth century, the soldier has become something that can be made; out of formless clay, an inapt body, the machine required can be constructed; posture is gradually corrected; a calculated constraint runs slowly through each part of the body, mastering it, making it pliable, ready at all times, turning silently into the automatism of habit.1

In Chapter 4 we saw how, in his story “The Medal,” Yasuoka Shōtarō used a metaphor of vision culled from his own army training to express the triviality of war and its aftermath on the individual level. Having been trained always to look at the ground as he walked, his protagonist finds after demobilization that the habit has become so deeply ingrained that he cannot rid himself of it. In typical Foucaultian fashion, this form of discipline is not entirely negative and prohibitory in its effects; it has benefits the military authorities never dreamed of—namely, finding useful objects in the midst of deprivation. Yasuoka’s overall theme, however, is the humiliating recognition of the degree to which his protagonist’s body behaviors have been changed by military training, chained to what Foucault calls “the automatism of habit.”

Like Yasuoka Shōtarō, two of the writers discussed in this chapter, Shimao Toshio and Kojima Nobuo, were fairly young men recently demobilized from military units when they began their writing careers. Having undergone the pervasive discipline of military life—which had prescribed and proscribed body attitudes, postures, and gestures for every conceivable activity; confined soldiers to specific

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1 Foucault, Discipline and Punish, 135.