

ULOGOS: On Image as Such, and the Language of Man

Tomoko Takemura

This article is based on my lecture series on Image and Culture held at Hitotsubashi University. Some topics from the lecture are transcribed and paraphrased, concentrating on the concept of “de-contextualization.” The following is a preface, rather than an abstract of the article.

In researching this concept, I relied solely on our leader Osugi’s words as my guide: We would rather perceive it as if we were “crawling about on the ground.” In this article, therefore, I have tried to “crawl about on the ground” as much as possible, in order to act “de-contextually.” In the first chapter, the essential substance of ‘images’ is considered, followed by an attempt in the second chapter to interpret the opening paragraphs of Walter Benjamin’s famous essay “*On Language as Such, and the Language of Man*” as precisely as possible. Into the interpretation I injected some inevitable arbitrariness, for reasons mentioned in the article, in order to apply “the principle of transmitting spiritual contents” as “the most profound essence of languages”—so says Benjamin—to the essential relationship between an image and its observer. The de-contextualization, however, should be observed not in this arbitrariness but in other properties of the article’s texture, even if it is not quite obvious.

The basic word “image” has many contexts in itself, especially in Japanese. The Japanese word “ime-e-ji,” which is borrowed from English, connotes not only “image” but also reputations, vague impressions, various phantoms, etcetera.. On the other hand, when we translate the English word “image” into Japanese, we often use the word “zou” or “ei-zou”; the former means sculptures, pictures, or figures, in addition to images, and the latter means more specifically “projected or mirrored images.” In this article, solely using the word “ei-zou” for this specific meaning, “the most profound essence” of “image=eizou as such” is ontologically sought and then re-defined as “what *is* as far as it *is* projected.” At the same time, in consideration of the principle of communication between an image and its observer, perception of an image is also understood as a total “output action” produced by its observer.