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A Conversation with Richard Calichman

Itaru Honjo, Emiko Inoue, Kazuma Morita, Nianzhou Ran, and Kei Yamaguchi

In July 2019, Professor Richard Calichman in the City College of New York came to Tokyo and participated in three academic events. Between the two related events (the symposium titled “Deconstruction of Japan Studies” on 14th July at Meiji University where he delivered the speech about the theme of “death” in Takeuchi Yoshimi’s arguments about Lu Xun and his lecture titled “Questioning of ‘Death’: on Kurosawa Akira’s Ikiru (To Live)” on 19th at Waseda University), the graduate student workshop was held at Hitotsubashi University on 16th, where two students, Kazuma Morita and Emiko Inoue, gave their presentations and received critical comments from Professor Calichman. (There Kazuma discussed on questions around war experience and narrative of testimony by reading the essays by a poet Ishihara Yoshirō, and Emiko analyzed the polemical aspects over the new concept of the time “eizō [image, visual image, moving image]” around 1960, the year of anti-Anpo struggle, by paying attention to two artists Abe Kōbō and Tōmatsu Shōmei.) On the next day of the workshop, five students captured the opportunity to have a talk with him more closely than the previous workshop. The following text is the fruits beard from this occasion.

Although this meeting had been initially designed for the interview with him concerning his research, thanks to Mr. Calichman’s passionate and rigorous responses to any
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questions from each student, the session was spontaneously proceeded in the style of conversation rather than a kind of planned interview. The dialogue starts with the talking about his itinerary of study up to this point, but, backed by his rigorously critical thinking on any disciplinary form of knowledge, the matters of argument exceed (yet also intrinsically retaining firm relationships with) the specific topics of his research and, occasionally digressing to some accidental problematics, reaches some general questions: “literature” and ”philosophy,” Takeuchi Yoshimi’s notion of “resistance (teikō)” and “Trans-lation.”

On the Starting Point of “Research”

Itaru Honjo: At the beginning, we hope you let us start by hearing about the starting point of your research. I heard that your interest in Japanese literature had begun from Genji Monogatari (The tale of Genji). Could you start by talking about this topic?

Richard Calichman: When I went to Cornell [University], I had the intention of studying Genji Monogatari. I think, the problem was that I had a certain orientalist fantasy with that. I was very much the product of Japan-U.S. relationship in thinking about Asia in a way that fell into the binary between the East and the West. I was very naïve. I didn’t know about the problematic nature of my prejudices until I went to Cornell and met Naoki Sakai. When I met him, everything changed for me. I have never met anyone who thought about things with the depth and penetration as he did. It was simply a coincidence that I met Naoki. I went to Cornell, not even knowing who Naoki was, and thinking about Japan Studies in a very traditional, stereotypical, and problematic way. And he immediately presented the form of thought that
problematized my own orientalist desires in a very critical way. He was making a deep critique of the entire structure of the western desire for Asia that I did not know I had.

One of the aspects of this structure between the West and the non-West is the fact that, in the typical western desire for the non-West, there is a certain “temporal framing.” When I say “the West,” we can understand that this is a racial term as well. But, in a certain way, “desire” is quite a fact that there are no such things called a white person and westerner, but nonetheless, at a certain level of discourse, one has to begin to speak in these terms in order to problematize them. This western desire can also be called white desire without investing in these terms any confidence. So, I think that this temporal framework is such that the western person sees him or herself as modern, and therefore, when they look to the oriental other, they see the premodern. The West sees itself as the very destination of modernity, culture, civilization, and rationality. And it sees the non-West and non-white as people who are not at that same level and, therefore, inferior. This is a structural desire. And, Naoki’s insight into this structure was shocking to me because I myself was participating in that structure without realizing it. So, I knew after meeting him that I needed to change my study quite radically, and the first thing I knew is that I could not continue to engage in “premodern” research. The problem of Asian Studies or Japan Studies is really the problem of modernity. And I wanted to situate my research in the era of “modernity” in order to have a chance to better grapple with the structures that were cultivating and generating my own desires. In a certain sense, it was a very personal realization. But I realized, after reading Naoki’s work for a while, that Naoki speaks to these situations precisely because they control subjects and provide something like a subjective formation in terms of creating desires and individual subjects. So, that was the shock I felt upon meeting Naoki, upon reading Naoki, and I realized then that I simply
could be a Nihon-Kenkyūsha (a scholar of Japan Studies) because that was to give in to certain orientalist fantasies, and I did not want to continue to do that. When one makes such a switch into becoming something more than a Japanologist and into trying to become something like intellectuals, it is extremely demanding and, truly, it is far easier to remain an orientalist with one’s very beautiful fantasies and desires. It is more difficult to be reflective of these things. But for me it means, because I was so profoundly indebted to Naoki, I knew that I needed to focus on “philosophy” specifically in order to understand the modern world and its power to create desires within me.

The most profound discipline was philosophy. It does not mean that one chooses philosophy necessarily as a discipline. Philosophy is not necessarily a discipline. Philosophy is a form of thinking that informs everything. Whenever thinking of anything at a certain level, then, one is embarking upon philosophical “question.” It is not simply that one chooses to be in philosophy program as opposed to non-philosophy program. Despite the fact that my official degree was in Japanese literature, I spent all of my time acquainting myself with the philosophical tradition. And I have tried, in my work, to allow that thinking to inform the way I engage with my research objects.

Kazuma Morita: You said that you had wanted to study Genji Monogatari and then needed to change your subject. Did it take a long time to find some appropriate writer or theme for your attempt to put into question the entities such as “Japan” or “Japanese”? Did you find Takeuchi Yoshimi quickly?

RC: I was quite fortunate because Naoki had just around that time published the philosophical essay on Takeuchi Yoshimi, and I knew that there was a traditional framework and paradigm for people in my field. And it seemed to me ridiculous. It seemed to me much more
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interesting to resist those expectations. To be a student in the field of modern Japanese literature, one needed to choose one author in the canon. So, there were some people who chose Mishima, Tanizaki, Sōseki .... Because I knew that was the expectation, protocol, and an essential part of problematic fantasy of orientalism, I knew that I needed to say “fuck you” to that structure. It is not because I do not love literature. I love literature passionately. But I did not want to be told what I should study when I did not really have any intellectual respect for the people in the field. And the fact that Naoki had written on Takeuchi seemed to me very promising. At that time, I wanted to work on Chinese and Japanese, and so Takeuchi represented a figure who would combine both of these worlds. So already, I think, there was a certain desire for “transgression.” On one thing, I did not want to write anything in a strictly literary sense, and Takeuchi was not a novelist. He represented a figure at least on the periphery of literature. And, in another sense of the desire for transgression or the desire to disobey the ruse of Japanese literary studies, I wanted to go outside of Japan, and that manifested itself in desire for focus on Takeuchi’s relationship with Lu Xun. When I did that, that was considered fairly unorthodox way of study. But the most important transgression would mean the great social transgression. But, you know, there was the certain “method” that appealed to me, and it has basically its root in the thought of Jacques Derrida.

The reading of Derrida was just a shocking to me as my reading of Naoki. And I realized that I needed to spend a great deal of my life trying to engage with and to understand what Derrida’s thinking was. But, one of the really important things about reading Derrida was that one is forced to read “tradition.” I feel, if one is a good reader of Derrida, then, one has to go back and spend time with people like Heidegger or Hegel. That realization began fairly early on in my career at Cornell, and, to this day, I continue to stay truly on it, despite the fact
that my research objects changed and I really no longer work on Takeuchi and Lu Xun so much. I worked on Abe Kōbō for a while, and now I think working on Kurosawa Akira — but, for me, the object is not really so important: what is important is the method. Which is to say, what is most important is a certain style of thinking, a certain way to think about things, regardless of what the object is. That continues to shape me. Think one: the dissatisfaction about the field of Japanese literary studies is that people want to work on a concrete thing; like a literary movement, a writer. That is certainly valid. But, the problem is, with that, the world and an idea simply work in a particular form. And so, recently, I have been obsessed with certain ideas, and I have been moving in direction of writing about those as opposed to writing on certain figures. So, when I first began in the field, I wrote a monograph on Takeuchi Yoshimi. And yet, now, in going away from these completed figures, my current work is on “the question of death.” And I see myself continue in that trajectory.

On “Philosophy” and “Literature”

Emiko Inoue: Can I ask a question? You said your interest is on philosophy. Were you attracted by Derrida in the first place? Or did you have any other figures back to your undergraduate?

RC: It is interesting. I am often possessed by the phrase “to attract people” and how one can understand “attraction.” Let’s say, Itaru and I become friends. Then, is it the fact that you like one another? Or that I knew someone ten years ago who somehow reminded me of him and therefore I wish to repeat that consciously? What is the beginning of the attraction? It is the thing that puzzles me. But when I met Naoki, I knew that I had to take this man very seriously. And when I came to Derrida, I knew that I had to spend a great deal of time with the
Derridean text. But, many people have met Naoki and many people have come to Derrida, and they have not necessarily reacted in the same way for me. Before I went to graduate school, I was a Buddhist man actually. And the desire to think of things on a certain abstract level and to ask questions that did not have answers to them, I think probably, had already manifested itself in me. When I got to graduate school, that desire still existed. And so, when I met thinkers like Naoki and Derrida, the decision had already been in me, in a certain sense. But, Emiko said in terms of your question, the first philosopher that I really became committed to was Derrida and remains Derrida. I will never fully grasp that system of thought. It is always more complex than I can understand. But, by staying with that system of thought, little by little it continues to give itself to me and enable me to understand things in more general way that informs my understanding of individual things.

IH: You said the important thing is not the object of study but the method. Yet, in reading of your study of Abe Kōbō (Beyond Nation), I was curious about your relationship with this object in your writing or thinking. Can I ask you about how you go about choosing the object of study? In this case, is there any decisive factor in your attention for Abe Kōbō?

RC: In scholarship, and in my life in general, I am attracted to strange people and things. And, for me, Takeuchi Yoshimi and Abe Kōbō are strange people. I do not really understand that strangeness. It is precisely because they make certain moves that confuse me and that is not “typical” standard expected. They became interesting to me as research object. I think that someone like Abe is a writer who very early on understood important ideas in art in any general sense. Art does not simply have relationship with the concrete, but also have the essential
relationship with the abstract. And, Abe spent a great deal of time thinking of things in a very conceptual and theoretical level. Precisely because he was able to do that, he came to realize not that he wanted to be strange, but that the world is originally and essentially a strange place, and that there is no such thing or existence that is not strange. Because he realized that, I feel, on theoretical level, he used that insight to inform his art of that strangeness.

When people read him, unfortunately he is read by people in Kokubungaku (Japanese literature), for example, who have no background in thinking. They take the most important thing, the most beautiful thing, and the most mysterious thing about him as something that is flat. What can they do if they do not have the training to do anything else? So, what they talk about are maybe Abe Kōbō with Manchuria, Abe Kōbō and high school here, his favorite desert, and what literary influence is … Sometimes that scholarship can be interesting, but, when one is really dealing with a writer in an essential way, one has to go deeper, and beyond that level. In the field of literary studies forth in Japan, and outside of Japan typically, people do not have the training to follow a writer. So, as a result, this writes off the fact that there are these wonderfully strange people in Japanese literature, (for example, Soseki is a very strange person, or people like Tanizaki is a very strange person.) but, if one does not have the ability to understand that strangeness in a philosophical manner, then one is cheapening these writers. One has to really work very hard in order to receive that strangeness into oneself. So, I think that the one institutional problem — and Naoki would say the same thing — is that literary studies as well as, of course, studies of history, studies of art history … anything has to include the commitment to philosophy. Philosophy can help us see the strangeness of things. Without that philosophical background, one is not able to get a true essence of what one wants to understand.
**KM:** What impressed me about your book *Beyond Nation* was that Abe’s “experiences” were excluded from your reading of him. Some researchers often focus on his experiences in Manchuria and argues that they were the decisive factor for his uniqueness as a writer. But you criticize that kind of critique. Do you consciously exclude writer’s experiences from your reading?

**RC:** It is a very important question, and I see that this question is coming from your talk yesterday. In your paper, you deal with a figure [Ishihara Yoshirō] who was traumatized by his experiences in camps, and it is important to treat things at that level. It is important to take seriously people’s traumatic experiences. I feel that one should not simply ignore certain experiences that individuals have in their lives. I think that one always has to be attentive to these things, on the one hand. And, on the other hand, however, when we talk about a person’s experiences, already philosophy has happened. Philosophy is already laying the groundwork for that conversation because philosophy has thought, for about two thousand years, what the concept of experience is. It is already engaging with us whether we realize it or not. And there are certain engagements of Ishihara about the concepts of experience and singularity.

Because there is a certain depth to the words that we use and to the concepts that we require to think anything, it is important to be conscious of those things. On the one hand, we have to pay attention to the fact that individuals live very individual lives. But, on the other hand, we really have to ask oneself more fundamentally: “What does it mean to experience something?” “What does it mean to remember an experience?” And, I think, we need to “transgress” these questions: “Is it possible to remember experiences?” “Is it possible to remember anything?” There are many philosophers who have dealt with these questions in a very powerful way. And, if we pretend that this discourse
does not exist, and we rely on something as fragile as commonsense to
guide our inquiry, and so speak na"ively about memory, about
experience, then, I think, one is not speaking with a great deal of rigor.

So, it is a double answer. On the one hand, we need to be
attentive to details that make up an individual life. But, on the other
hand, we need to try to think about how this regiment is possible in
questioning the basic concepts that we appeal to in order to think of
anything. As soon as that happens, that makes our relationship with
these details of individual lives very complex. And so, it no longer
becomes sufficient to simply say: “this person had this experience.” A
certain kind of journalistic discourse, or academic journalistic
discourse of philosopher, relies on that. But, for me, if one wants to
speak with rigor, one can no longer stay on that discourse.

KM: I understand your thought that we must read literary works not
only on empirical level but also on philosophical or conceptual level.
When I examine Ishihara Yoshirō and Ōoka Shōhei, I am always
surprised to see how deeply they believe entities such as “Japan” or
“Japanese.” This kind of desire seems to be partly coming from their
experiences in the camps or Japan’s surrender in the Asia Pacific War.
I wonder how I should treat such a conservative tendency in them. I
think that we need to read their works in a manner different from that
in which we read Abe Kōbō. I feel that thinking about their works
philosophically will give me some clues.

RC: I think that it is not as if philosophy comes from the outside. And
so, in writers or artists themselves, there are always necessarily
philosophical elements of their work. And indeed you can see Ōoka’s
very powerful philosophical thinking in Nobi (Fires on the Plain), for
example. In that novel, the narrator is trying to write about his wartime
experiences. And he realizes that it is extremely difficult and there are
fantasies involved, and desires involved. So, philosophically, he is making a certain observation, which is to say that the notion of remembering experiences is never a simple thing. I think, when one really begins to read and understand philosophy, one gradually realizes that, in any text, there are necessarily philosophical elements. The trick is: one needs to train oneself in order to reveal those elements.

Okay, now let’s get to the point about “Japan,” which is an important point. I agree that Ishihara and Ōoka, and other writers as well, certainly have those concepts of “motherland” or “fatherland” very much in mind. But, this is simply because they belong to “modernity.” Which is to say, I think, they have these concepts not simply as an intellectual way of thinking about Japan or other places. There is also an emotional commitment. And that, these concepts can shape a life formulaically. So, for example, when one thinks about the huge framework of American desires and fantasies about Japan, one finds, in my own field, that there is a desire for Americans to learn about Japan not because Americans want to learn about Japan, simply. It is because Americans want to learn about Americans vis-a-vis the presence of Japan. Without recognizing and realizing that they are participating in that structure, it is a form of narcissism. It is a desire to look at the world as a mirror in which we are really looking at ourselves. So, as a result, Japan Studies in the United States, in a certain sense, should really be called American Studies because we can say that Japanese are X, Y, Z, and it is because Americans want to see themselves as non-X, non-Y, non-Z. There is this very powerful binary structure that is not limited to the Nichibei (Japan-U.S.) relationship and informs many other things.

But, I think, the problem is: when one thinks of oneself as a subject, then one looks out in the world, or sees the world, the reflection of oneself, and does not have to be in an immediate reflection, and stop looking at people who are like you. It could be in an immediate way —
which is to say: you “project” the difference upon those people in order to confirm the mutual difference between “you” and “them.” So, that relates to the point earlier I made about orientalist fantasies. By talking about things like oriental beauty, and something like oriental tradition, the American or Western “researcher” confirms to him- or herself the difference between Americans and Japanese.

**KM:** I have another question about your methodology. I feel that your reading of Takeuchi Yoshimi is quite different from that of Sakai Naoki. I would like to ask you how you think about the difference between you and him. When I read your book *Displacing the West*, I felt that you attempted very hard to grasp the ambiguous and complicated nature of Takeuchi’s works. You point out that while Takeuchi looks like a nationalist and essentialist, there is also the potentiality of the community that exceeds that framework in his works. I would like to ask you about the difference between your work and Sakai’s.

**RC:** We touched upon that yesterday, I think, when I was commenting on your paper. You cited in your paper Judith Butler’s notion of the body and Naoki’s notion of fundamental sociality. And I mentioned that there is the advantage to the concept of sociality, but there is the corresponding disadvantage. So, for me, the notion of sociality is something that I personally do not use, but I understand why Naoki feels a need to use that. I think that all thinkers have different problematics even if they might appear similar. Naoki is interested in slightly different things from I am. At the same time, the overlap between our works, I think, is massive. And, in the field in the United States, whenever they talk about my work, they are always saying that it is so similar to Naoki’s work. It is true I spent eight years with Naoki, and I continue to be with him, continue to learn from him. And, I, of course, recognize that his work has been one of the main influences in
my thinking. Everything I do would be impossible without Naoki. But, at the same time, just as individuals are never identical to themselves, there is always difference between people. So, Naoki’s problematic is slightly different from my own. There are simply maybe biographical reasons for that. I think one thing that is really wonderful about Naoki is that Naoki is essentially a thinker of “modernity.” For me, this is his major contribution to the history of ideas. Naoki understands structures of modernity in an extremely powerful way. And so, when you think about what concepts have attracted Naoki, there is a great binding between these concepts — Naoki has edited a book on race in Japanese studies. Naoki, of course, has written extensively on the concept of nation. Naoki is one of the great thinkers of national subjectivity, what it means to be a Japanese person or means to be an American person — All of these things are crucial aspects of what it means to be in Europe modernity. You can see Naoki is trying to engage critically with this huge apparatus of modernity from different angles. But, all of these angles are ultimately related. So, I think, for him, in order to write about “nation,” he feels that, at a certain point, he needs to write about “race.” But, writing about “race,” that informs the development in his thinking about “national subjectivity.” All these things mutually reinforce one another, but they are all slightly different from one another. But I think that this difference simply reflects the fact that modernity and apparatus of modernity is a vast one. Naoki needs one to understand many different aspects in Europe are impossible to understand without these vast numbers of study about modernity. I am, in my own work what I have carried out, influenced by that. — That’s not really what I do myself …?

So, these past couple of years, I felt myself really haunted by three interrelated concepts. These concepts may not haunt Naoki in quite the same way for me, just as the concept of modernity does not haunt me in the same way it haunts Naoki. I think he is forced to turn
to engage with this discourse in more committed way than I have, without question. But, for me, in these past couple of years, I suddenly found myself really haunted by these interrelated concepts and I continue thinking about them because these concepts are inexhaustible. These three concepts are: “a question of death,” “a question of time,” and “a question of memory.” There are a variety of reasons of my thinking to this turn. I think, in the beginning of my career when I was closer to Naoki, I was really interested in questions of “modernity,” “national subjectivity,” and “race.” But after leaving Cornell, I finds myself on the slightly different path, and the fact is that life was of course happening to me, and I found myself getting older, and I found my parents getting older. And, I felt that: there was this thing of time that was happening to me, and — it frightened me. I thought about the fact that my parents are aging, and they will die. And I thought that I needed to think about this very traditional philosophical problematic that many thinkers have been thinking about for a long time: that is, the relationship between “death” and “time.”

When you think about the essential relationship between time and death, the reason for such an essential relationship is because you cannot have one without another. If there were no time in the world — for example, the court angels in the heaven — there is no death. (Right to be an angel is not to die.) But, we as mortal human beings live in the world, on the earth. And we are temporal beings. We live in time precisely because we live in time. It means that we must die. If there is time, then there must be death. Which is to say, all things come into being at a certain point, and then they vanish from being at another point. But I think the same thing can be said in the reverse. Which is to say, if there is time, there is death. But also, if there is death, there is time. And that would be to think about time in a way that broadens the concept of death.

So, just now, I was talking about individual death. (Which is to
say that human beings die something like a biological death.) But I think that we can broaden the concept of death to think about “the disappearance in general.” And so, you think about, let’s say, the concept of friendship: one of the great pleasures in life, friendship. But one also talks about “the death of friendship.” So it is not simply that “death” can only be used in a biological sense, but that “death” is also used in a more “abstract” sense. It is so in common sense, not simply by the discourse of philosophy, but in a common sensical way. And now I think that how we think about “the death of flextime.” It is intrinsically essential in the sense that it relates ”have” with “timework.” Indeed, it is not that there are these positive moments that just continue sequentially: there is a now, and then a next now, then a next now … There are thinkers of time who have tried to problematize this notion of time which is thought based on “positivity.” On the contrary, those people think that time you think about, or how many time you think “have,” in the basis of “negativity.” Which is to say, we have one moment, but, as soon as that one moment appears, in order for there to be a new moment, that moment has to die. For example, there is the traditional distinction made in philosophy between time and space. According to a certain kind of philosophy, in space we can have two objects that exist simultaneously. But, if there is one moment in time, that means that another moment in time cannot exist. So, in order to have two moments in time, there needs to be something like violence or death. One moment must disappear in order for time to continue work, for new moments to begin for people. So, the essence of modern thing is that in order to perceive time, we need to conceive of time as constantly dying itself. And that there was no opening to future if there is no death of individual moments. Precisely presenting individual moment that dies, the future appears. When one thinks about that, there is the strange relationship, the strange intimacy, between death and birth, that is precisely because each moment must die, but, in dying, it
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gives birth to not. And everyone might experience this in a more commonsensical way in returning to the concept of friendship: the death of one friendship that creates the possibility for the birth of new and other friendships. It is slightly different and it is not an exact and accurate analogy. But the point is that — if death is crucial to the movement of time, then that is not something to be mourned, and it is not necessarily an unfortunate fact. That precisely because time must constantly die to itself, that creates this wonderful things called time, called the future. There are new things that may happen precisely because death is constantly happening. So, that has been a powerful “paradox.” That has worked in my thinking not simply about relationship, but specifically have the concepts of time and death are interwoven.

And “the concept of memory” is something that I have been thinking about in terms of Derrida for quite some time. I have been feeling recently that one of the crucial aspects of deconstruction is precisely the concept of memory. Given that time is constant death, how do we “hold on to things”? And, when I say “hold on to things,” that is simply another name for memory. But given the fact that the movement of time is the constant movement of death, how can we hold on to anything from the past? Each one would hold on to you when we open our hands and look at what we hold on to you from the past, we realize that it is no longer the same thing and it is somehow different from what we originally had in the past. So, the concept of memory for me, and I think for Derrida as well, is crucial deconstruction because deconstruction is philosophy of time. When you think about time, you need to talk about memory because it is not as if there is only death. Things happen in the world. And, in order to “understand” these things, we need to rescue that thing, resurrect that thing, revive that thing. That is already dead because it is already in the past and bringing it to the present. In order to understand anything at all about our own lives, what
will we do is — remembering. And, “the paradox of remembering” something haunts me.

IH: Could you say about your thinking about the commitment for “philosophy” rather than “theory”?

RC: I think that when one uses the term like “theory” in history of thought, it has traditionally been opposed to the concept of “praxis.” And I think that, if one focuses on theory that has history of being negation and exclusion of praxis, maybe that might not be the best way to think about the concept. Of course, I realize that young scholars today who are in literary studies and visual studies like to use the term “theory” or “critical theory.” That is fine. At a certain point, these terms might be seen as interchangeable. On the other hand, however, these terms do have a long “tradition.” And I think that it is important to realize that this term “theory” might not be the most appropriate and accurate term to use when one tries to think what one is doing in thinking conceptually about the world precisely in a way that would allow for greater politicality. Philosophy itself as a term has certain problems. For example, Heidegger preferred the term “thinking.” All terms have certain advantages and disadvantages. But for me, when I think about the kind of word that interest me, I tend to use the term “philosophy.” And it is important that philosophy does not exist in an original identifiable place. Philosophy is everything. There is no way that we can make a distinction between philosophy and the non-philosophical.

EI: Can I ask a question? You talked about praxis, and it seems connected to Marxist theories. What is your sense of Marxist studies? I am just curious to know about this very much in light of what you said on Derrida.
RC: In my own work, that is not the field that I myself engage with. In terms of my work, I am most interested in the relationship of Derrida to Heidegger to Hegel. And I think almost everything I do touches upon the influence of these three thinkers. Are there shortcomings or blind spots in my work because I avoid certain Marxist questions? I think there are. At the same time, one can say, about all the thinker, that, whatever one decides to do by choosing this topic, one necessarily excludes other thinkers. And I think in my own case that, there are many thinkers that I exclude. Maybe that is not the best way to do things, but I realize that is inevitable. Other people do scholarship in which they are influenced much more strongly by Marxist ideas, and, in many cases, I admire that scholarship. But it is not what I do personally. You can see the same thing, for example, in Derrida. Derrida, throughout his entire career, received criticisms from Marxist scholars. And it is understandable that Heidegger received criticisms from Marxist thinkers, or thinkers who were close to the Marxist tradition. For example, Adorno was very much a non-fan of Heidegger. So, there is this tendency among thinkers to choose certain paths that necessarily lead to the exclusion of other thinkers that might be important. I think at very least one can realize the potentiality in those thinkers that one does not necessarily directly engage with. I think this is something Derrida felt in Marx despite the fact that he was not really directly engaged with the text of Marx except in *Specters of Marx*. Despite that, he remained very much openminded about certain possibility inherent in Marxian text. So, that would be, I think, maybe one way to resolve this problematic.

**On the Notion of “Resistance (teikō)”**

Nianzhou Ran: I want to ask you a question. You mentioned western desires for Asia. What do you think about Takeuchi Yoshimi’s research
on China? Can it be explained by something like “Japanese desire for China”?

**RC:** It is a great question. I think Takeuchi began by being upset with that structure. I think he began reading Lu Xun specifically. And then, he was at Tōdai (Tokyo Imperial University) and saw, at that time, that there was the great Japanese desire for a certain kind of China, which would be a very traditional China, which would be to ignore “modern China.” I think that Takeuchi did not call it orientalism, but he simply thought about it in terms of certain “structure” that was inherent in “modernity,” where one people claim their own superiority by looking at other people, who then become the opposite of that superiority. I think Takeuchi realized that he needed to begin writing a certain kind of sinology in a way that was radically different from that precisely because he realized that sinology in Japan was a problem of “desire”: orientalist desire or fantastic desire. I think Takeuchi felt angry that Japanese considering themselves to be the most modern nation in Asia, looking down upon China. And, for him, on the contrary, there were many things that the great Chinese writers need to tell us about what the structure of modernity is. In a certain sense, there was a “reverse orientalism” in him. He thought that China was this great nation that has *resisted* western modernity unlike Japan, that fell into the trap of western modernity. But, on the other hand, he identified Japanese desires for China, desires to patronize it in a very powerful way.

I think that there are these two very different aspects in Takeuchi. But his reading of Lu Xun, his reading about how Lu Xun was able to teach Japan certain things, is something extremely powerful despite the fact that certain moments are problematic without that. If one is not able to capture the political and philosophical contributions that Takeuchi made, then one isn’t really reading Takeuchi very well. I think that it is no coincidence that people who have been interested in
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Takeuchi have been really smart people. Satoshi Ukai is very interested in Takeuchi. Naoki is very interested in Takeuchi. Both these men find certain Derridean elements in Takeuchi despite the fact that both men realize that there are certain problems in him. I think that, like all writers, there are these very interesting inconsistencies in his text. So, it would relate to the question you posed.

Kei Yamaguchi: Naoki Sakai is one of those who have been instrumental in bringing in critical perspectives especially (but not limited to) in the domain of what is called Asian studies, which would help us call into question the structures of knowledge production. In his article “Modernity and Its Critique: The Problem of Universalism and Particularism,” for instance, Sakai engages with a number of questions such as those of the concept of modernity, the schema of “the West and the Rest” and the imaginary entity called Asia. You are dealing at length with Takeuchi’s notion of “resistance (teikō)” in your book Takeuchi Yoshimi: Displacing The West in a way that resonates with Sakai’s reading of Takeuchi. I think that this closely relates to Takeuchi’s “critique” of the desire for China. Could you elaborate on that notion?

RC: I think that when Naoki reads Takeuchi and Takeuchi’s reading of Lu Xun, Naoki goes to Takeuchi and goes to Lu Xun as well. And I think that Ukai-san follows that same path. I think both of them very much overlap. In my reading, I probably overlap with them as well — which is to say that Takeuchi saw something in Lu Xun that he calls “resistance.” I think that Naoki, Ukai-san, and I really want to try to excavate the potential in that. But it is a very complex thing to do. The notion of “resistance” is not simply synonymous with “opposition.” So, we have, on the one hand, the concept of “resistance” and, on the other, we have the concept of “opposition.” I think that it’s important to make
a distinction between these two things. This relates to a comment I made yesterday when I commented on the two papers. I said that it’s important as graduate students and as intellectuals to say “fuck you.” One has to say that if one wants to be a real intellectual as opposed to a fake. But I think that that only begins to touch upon the problem because it’s very easy to say “fuck you” in a foolish, naïve, silly way. If one wants to act on “will,” you have to do a lot of work. It’s easy to convince oneself that the pleasure one feels in saying “fuck you” is substantial. I think this relates to Takeuchi’s notion of “resistance.” When there are power structures, one wishes to oppose these power structures.

I gave the example yesterday, when we think about the present, about what is a certain current and what is the dominant current in the humanities these days. You can often find this current among graduate students. Graduate students are really good in terms of being sensitive to new currents of thought. Recently, you can see in Japan and in many places, and certainly in the United States as well, that there is a notion of “identity politics.” You can see this in the #MeToo movement and in various forms. I think that essentially — or formally, or structurally, — the notion of identity politics, the notion of protecting people who have been persecuted and who have been in minorities, is very similar to what Takeuchi was interested in Lu Xun all way back in 1940s. Of course, the content was different. Takeuchi was not thinking about lesbians, gay men or people of colors at that time. But when we think about “minority,” I think that it is important to understand it in a non-empirical way. It is important to understand that there is not a certain structure of minority, but something we might call one of “minoritization” — which is to say that: all social formations need to create minorities. In any social formation, the notion of “equality” is simply a tatemae (token acknowledgement) structure. It doesn’t truly exist. So, there needs to be a creation of power relations. And I think
that when one thinks about this “formally” than “historically,” the identity of minorities *constantly changes*.

I will give you an example from my own life. I was born a Jew. When I was born a Jew at that moment of history in the United States, it meant I was white. But, when my grandfather was born a Jew, it meant that he was non-white. It was very strange when I remember speaking with him that he had a certain *fear* of the United States because he thought that there was a majority called the white Protestants who were going to persecute him. And I remember, as a child being, very amused by this fear. The reason why I felt such detachment from it is because I had already become a white. That history had determined that the Jews in the United States were white at that time, whereas my grandfather did not look at himself as a white, as a real American. He looked at himself as a Jew who could have been slaughtered during the 1940s when he fought this war, and he thought it could have happened in New York, and might have happened in the United States. So, in his time, he could only date and marry other Jews. No Jews considered themselves white in the United States. They huddled together in the little places for the most part of them, although there were exceptions. My grandfather’s “experiences” were very much part of that. There was not a great deal of integration. But, by the time it became to my generation, I was considered white, I was considered American, and I considered myself like that.

So, this shows that the notion of “minoritization” is constantly changing. This is just one example. For Takeuchi, at that time, he wanted to make a political critique of Japan. So, he focused on “a minority called the Chinese.” But now, in Japanese discourse, to focus on the Chinese as a minority would be considered quite ridiculous because things have changed radically from Takeuchi’s time. And, I think that, on the one hand, it is important to pay a very historical attention to the fact that people such as Jews, gay men, and women
have certain histories of persecution. One has to be attentive to the
details. But one also has to realize that there is a process called
“minoritization” that does not exempt anyone. So, it does mean that:
when we are living in social formation, there is a sense of fear. Why?
*Because any person who belongs to that social formation is potentially a next minority.* No matter what the person is — a man or a woman,
white or non-white, or straight or gay — it makes no difference. And it
is not necessarily that minority is smaller in numbers than majority. I
think that, in order to understand “modernity,” one needs to understand
the relationship between power and non-power partly on the basis of
the process of the “minoritization.” When we do that, we realize that
we do not need to engage with the “categories” like woman, Jew,
colored, in a reified way because it really prevents us from thinking
about *the dynamics between majority and minority.* When we think
about it as a *movement,* we can deal with these very real political
problems in a more sophisticated way.

**IH:** I’m interested in your statement because I’ve never met someone
like you who think and speak Takeuchi’s “resistance” and something
like #MeToo movement on the same plane. Then, my comment might
be a kind of naïve thinking. But, hearing your statement, I imagined
what would happen if something like the annihilation of philosophy
would come because of transformations in the infrastructural condition.
Is it possible to continue the non-empirical thinking or the activity of
“philosophy” in your sense without counting such a condition,
something like, for example, the university?

**RC:** I think that, when we think about the annihilation of philosophy
as you mentioned, there are two ways to think about that. You
mentioned the “institution” of the university. I think that in our current
period — and I think Ukai-san would certainly agree with this point —
the fact is that the number of students and faculty who think the study of philosophy is important for knowledge, that would be crucial of any form of education, is declining. I think it is a cause for concerns. As a result, one begins to reify things, thinking that there is art history here, or Japanese literature here .... I do not think things work like that — things are always interrelated. Philosophy can help us understand relations between things. If it is not studied, it leads to forms of “particularist” knowledge. Where you get the specialists of each field, these people are very boring because they know nothing outside of their own discipline. That would be one understanding of philosophy, that is, disciplinary understanding. But, as I mentioned before, there is another way to understand philosophy. I think that: anytime “questioning” leads in a certain direction, it becomes philosophical. Let’s say we are talking about the weather very pleasantly, and then a strange person suddenly comes and says: “What is the weather?” “What is the ‘concept’ of weather?” Of course, the first thing we would do is to throw this person out of the room. But, after we had violently excluded that person, we would then realize that somehow “philosophy” have entered there in the everyday discourse. So because the possibility always exists whenever one asks a question: “What is something?” “What is the nature of something.” Or, even when one questions, “what is the essence of something?” in a classical way, one is already operating in philosophical terms. So, that’s it! Even if philosophy is banished from humanities and that never reappears again, the notion, the discourse, the style, the genre of ever philosophy would never go away because it is just an intrinsic aspect of “thinking” itself.

And this is something that, to go back to question, explains Naoki’s intervention in the field of Japan Studies, because Naoki was a strange person who said, “what is the ‘concept’ of weather?” So you had a table of people who said: “I love Tanizaki.” “I love Japanese nostalgia.” “I love Japanese photography in the 1950s.” And then,
Naoki was a strange person, who entered the room, and he said, “what is Japan?” And so, of course, these people at the table, the first thing they did is to throw him out of door. As a result, Naoki is widely hated in the field because people fear him; because they don’t know how to respond to this question. And, it is a lot easier if you have a person who is an expert in Japanese film talks to someone who is an expert in Japanese literature, because they can all say: “This is one part of Japan.” “This is not part of Japan.” But as soon as someone like Naoki comes in and says: “What do you mean to talk about Japan?” “What does it mean to talk about any nation state that is not Japan?” Then, the fact is that philosophy has already come in, and it is engaging with the human sciences. I think that, if one wants to be an “intellectual,” and want to seriously think about things, it is important to be that stranger who has such questions.

**KM:** I would like to ask you about the sentence: “What is something?” For example, the entity called “Japan” is a very powerful concept because it has a long history and many people believe in its existence. If we would like to put into question such entities, can we have a conversation with believers of such a concept? It is a very important task to keep questioning its existence, but the fact is that there are still many people who believe in it in the world.

**RC:** This relates to the question of “strategy.” Because the fact is that anywhere, any university that I know, this is how knowledge production is organized. And so, if one wants to join this profession, one has to realize: “This would be the reception.” “It would be a hostile reception.” And one has to be prepared for that. It is very nice to be in this room to talk about these beautiful ideas. As soon as we leave this room, one is going to come across people who guard their consciousness territory. And the fact is that when you get jobs, you
would be at the very bottom of the level. Which is to say, you need to have certain “social skills” like: “Thank you very much.” “Please may I do this.” You have to follow these rules. You can say, “fuck you.” But again, that would be a very violent way because the only result would be that you will be fired. So, I think that, in order to say, “fuck you,” you have to learn to say: “Please.” “Thank you very much.” “How is your husband doing?” “How is your wife doing?” “I hope your kids are well.” And then, you need to send nengajōs (New Year’s cards). Things like exact this. But the fact is that this is a form of “strategy” and one cannot oppose these people. So, the fact is: one has to engage these people; and one has to learn to wear masks; and one has to learn to multitask.

I think that it is never easy and there can be no general rules because each situation in dealing with people offer you is different. And, one is forced sometimes to do this in order to be part of that group. I think that the part of this, you know, relates to the concept of “border,” or the concept of “periphery.” I think Abe Kōbō has the concept of what is it — “Uchinaru henkyō (the frontier within)” — It somehow relates to that. It is not in the sense of Abe with the only personal protest many people have been thinking in the historical case of the concept of “border.” But, I think, it is important to think in this way about the question of how one asks that. You find yourself in the department and you have all these people who want to “hold on to” their territory. And you come in and you have the good fortune of learning to think about things, not simply being an expert on this course subject or that course subject … And, I think that, you know about somehow occupying the position on the “border” well, you are able to speak with them but you are able to remain critically apart from them — I think it is a very important skill to learn. And this will be part of reason why the “theory” is not really appropriate because the “theory” — which has conditioning, meta opposite: “praxis” — can’t take this into account.
Because the fact is that, in order to do this well, which is a form of social “practice,” or social “praxis,” we need to develop “the social skills” that will allow us to be part of a group and yet to be on its “periphery” or “border” so that we are not interpellated by that group and that we retain enough of an “exteriority” to be critical. This is extraordinarily difficult. And, I think, if you ask any serious thinkers, they would say that this is a very important skill to learn.

I think that it is important for people to do two different things: It is important for people to learn to think abstractly about general things — What is experience? What is memory? What is life? What is death? — We need these thinks. But, on the other hand: we need to develop the very concrete social skills that will allow our discourses to participate in the dominant discourses.

**On “Trans-lation”**

**EI:** You translated Abe Kōbō’s word “eizō” as “visual image.” I was just interested in the term well. Why did you choose the word “visual image”? What were your thoughts around it? I really thought about that when I read your texts. It was just for the icebreaker in my translation process for the preparation of my paper about “eizō” yesterday.

**RC:** It was quite a few years ago when I did that, and I don’t remember the particular moment. When I translate, I have a friend who checks my translation. Because my native language is English, there are possibilities of errors. So, I think I wrote “image” originally, and then my friends suggested that “visual image” would be better in order to distinguish it from things like “sonic image.” Whereas Abe seems to be talking about images as opposed to, let’s say, there are all factory images, sonic images and various forms of image, he really seems to be talking about “visual arts” then. I think that is probable.
NR: You mentioned the Chinese as a minority back in 1940s in Japan. What do you think about Takeuchi’s use of the word “chūgoku” when other people used “shina.” Can I ask your supposition about whether or not he thought it would be better to use “shina” when other people started to use the word “chūgoku” lately?

RC: I think it relates to a certain attitude that was linked to that usage. It wasn’t just the usage itself. The usage represented a certain attitude or a certain form of “practice.” I think he really disagreed with the practice itself that was represented by the name “shina.” And so, he felt that, in order to establish a great relation of parity or respect between Japan and China, that may be better the word “chūgoku” than “shina.” I think that was his initial move. As for his later move when “China” became dominant, this is one thing about Takeuchi that he really liked to play the devil's advocate. If everyone was doing something, there was part of him where he would love to say: “Fuck you, you’re all wrong. I’m doing that.” And I think that there is a certain moment that has a wonderful quality and there are other moments where he becomes a little bit silly. I think that that might be related to one of his silly moments.

NR: It seems like he had his own understanding of China and he is proud of it. I don’t know what it really is. And, there is another question. He went to China several times as a student or as a soldier. After the end of the war, he wrote articles. But, it seems that he kept his distance from China. So, what do you think about this?

RC: He had problematic things to say about what it means to be a Chinese person. You know, at that time, Japanese sinology only dealt with basically “dead” Chinese people. They dealt with old texts. And this is the “replication” of the western desire for Asia — which is to
say, in order to position itself as “modern,” Japan wanted to deal with “premodern” Chinese texts: Confucius, Mencius or people like that.

In order to resist this discourse, Takeuchi wanted to talk about “real” Chinese people, meaning “living” Chinese people. But when he makes this move, he falls into serious traps. He went to China when he studied abroad, and he wrote articles about “real” Chinese people, and “living” Chinese people. We can see a certain critical impulse because he is making a critique of Japanese sinology that only talked about “dead” Chinese people. But when one asks oneself what it means to be a “real” Chinese person, it is a category of exclusion. As soon as we use the term “real” when talking about certain national people, then one is implicitly saying that there are certain people who are not real: who are inauthentic or fake. So, I think that, in his attempt to make a critique of an existing discourse, Takeuchi introduced another problem. That was just as problematic as the problem that he was trying to overcome.

So, as for your question, I think it’s quite problematic the way Takeuchi conceived of China. And I think that, from a more critical perspective, the fact is that there is no such thing as a Chinese person. One has to ask oneself why one has this desire to say, “this is a Chinese person.” Of course, there are certain historical reasons why Takeuchi wants to say this, and those reasons have to be considered very carefully. But, on the other hand, there is the real desire to reify this thing called a Chinese person. As soon as you do that, then you are silently reifying the things called “Chinese culture” and “Chinese tradition,” and making a distinction between “real” Chinese people and “non-real” Chinese people. One question might be well: What do you do about people from Taiwan? What do you do about the Uyghurs? Takeuchi becomes complicit with Chinese nationalism by introducing the category of “real Chinese people.”
KM: I hope my next question has some connection with our theme, translation. I think these events — a symposium on Sunday, a graduate workshop yesterday and this interview — are very interesting because we are moving between Japanese language and English language. On Sunday, we talked about “deconstruction of Japan studies” in Japanese, and yesterday we talked about our research project in English. To me, it is a very interesting phenomenon. I think it has some connection with the fact that you are also a translator of Japanese thought. I wonder what the meaning of your commitment to Japanese language is for you. I’m interested in this problem because, if I talk about my private problem, for me speaking English is some emancipation from the burden of Japanese language. Japanese language is often a burden for me, though English is another burden for me. At least, moving from Japanese language to English language sometimes means emancipation for me.

RC: I think for me, there is a certain kind of “negativity” that I always wish to preserve even though I often fail. When I went into Japan studies, I didn’t want to be simply an American who focused my attentions on Japan; there is something fetishistic about that relationship — that sort of disgust. So, in order to introduce a certain “negativity” to that relationship — it’s my professional relationship, I need this type of relationship, but I hate this relationship — I began working on China, lived in Taipei, for about two years. For me, this allowed me, as you said maybe, a certain sense of “emancipation.” But what always seemed to me is: they are closures. I was raised in a family that only speaks English; for me, this was a closure. And, I wanted to get out of that; I wanted to learn another language; but then, that created — a new closure! What I thought: all those Americans who only know about Japan and don’t know anything else are quite stupid. But when you ask them how much they know about Japanese literature or
Japanese something — they don’t know anything else! And so, I saw that as a new closure! I wanted to escape that. And then, given my own philosophical interest, I wanted to read Derrida in the original French. I spent much time for it. So, each time, I feel that when I feel like the world is becoming too — closed for me? Then I become restless! I feel like I need to somehow get out of that! And to learn another language. So I understand your concept: your idea about “emancipation.” I think yet, at the ultimate level, these terms are not rigorous.

You know, as the notion of English is something that does not exist outside of Japanese, the notion of Japanese does not exist outside of English certainly when you are looking at katakana words or gairaigo (loan words). It is clear that English has come in and occupied Japanese language. But that’s not a bad thing, for things to come into another thing. Of course, it’s a logic of imperialism. It’s a logic of the occupation. They could be a dangerous thing. But the very concept of something to come in to disturb the propriety — the original propriety? some other things? — that’s seemed to me good thing, even though there are certain political dangers or historical dangers that one has to be sensitive to. And, I think that, when I feel my English being contaminated by my experience with other language, I feel this great pleasure. And I feel that, the English I speak is an English that has traces of other languages already inside it. This gives me a new sense of “emancipation” in my own language because it’s no longer my own language. The English I speak is entirely different from the English of my parents’ precisely because other languages have come into it and occupied it.

EI: Yesterday you said about “dialectics.” When I was writing on Abe Kōbō, I thought that the dialectic of Abe Kōbō seems quite different from that of western philosophy. I was interested in how you engage in the dialectical thinking of Abe Kōbō. I think you have a lot of Derrida,
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Heidegger, and the likes, and you also choose some subject like Abe Kōbō. I had a comment from Ukai-san yesterday: “If you want to think about negativity and dialectic, you must reread Hanada [Kiyoteru Hanada] or something.” When I was writing for the workshop yesterday, it was very different from when I was writing on the dialectical things or, for example, on an American artist. So do you have thoughts in terms of “dialectics” and “translation”?

RC: When I began rereading Derrida, I was partially attracted to him because deconstruction partially sets itself as an attempt to engage with dialectics. As I mentioned yesterday, all “thinking” must deal — whether it wishes to or not, it has not choice — with “the question of negativity.” Then I think: dialectics begins as an attempt to deal with “the enigma of negativity.” But I also think that it does so in a way that is quite limited: it ultimately appropriates the force of negativity in a way that leads to something like the formation of the subject. Deconstruction follows many of the same paths that dialectics does. It has very much the same interest in negativity or it is obsessed by the question of negativity in a way that dialectics is. But I think, it realizes that negativity is not something to be mastered, something to be controlled or something to be appropriated: ultimately, in the relationship between man and negativity, man does not have the last word, but negativity has the last word. In my thinking, in a certain sense, it represents the fundamental difference between dialectical form of thinking and deconstruction.

KY: Bringing our conversation back to the question of translation, I was wondering if it can be argued that the question of negativity is deeply linked to that of translation, given the constitutive role that translation plays in the formations of subjectivity. If it is valid to say that every negation presumes a dialectic relation in which something
to be negated is always already constituted, it makes me think of what Sakai calls “the representation of translation” against which “the act of translation” is understood. In the latter, language cannot be perceived as an individual, predetermined unity. However, it seems that the dominant conception of translation as a way of bridging two separate entities or of making discontinuity continuous still remains prevalent. How can we think about translation without ending up enclosing it in the opposition of the self and the other? Besides, if we are talking about, for example, increasing attempts to translate Japanese texts into English, I think that there seems to be a certain kind of division of labor that affects the ways in which knowledge is produced in the field of Japanese studies. Do you have any thoughts about these points?

**RC:** In the field of Japan studies in the United States, people in literature translate; people in history don’t. Traditionally, up until recently, people in literature translated one thing: novels. Now, what happens when one has this practice is that: no one really problematizes it. While one has, in some cases, many excellent translations of beautiful novels or very important novels, but in terms of huge intellectual contributions of Japanese thinkers that did not appear in the form of novels, they were ignored. That struck me as a sort of art: while there would be a fetishistic focus on one genre called novel, all other genres were more or less ignored. And I think that relates to how literature is seen as a discourse that is outside of philosophy. What I wanted to do by introducing certain philosophical elements in Takeuchi as well as doing *Contemporary Japanese Thought* is to introduce philosophy to the field, and basically remind scholars of Japan studies that: any discourse requires philosophical reflection. I think now that project failed quite spectacularly. If my attempt is to say “fuck you” to the field, they attempt to say in return “no fuck you” much more powerfully and effectively. I think, the field remains just as not non-
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philosophical but aggressively anti-philosophical now as ten years ago or twenty years ago or so. That project was probably a failure, but that is OK. That was my own attempt. I feel that it is important to remind people that there is the presence of philosophy, and that if one works only on literature or on history, one is in fact doing philosophy in just a non-reflective way. That was my motivation.

But, in terms of the concept of “translation” itself, you are exactly correct that Naoki makes a very important distinction between “the act of translation” and “the representation of translation.” And this has been influential for me. Anything Naoki says about translation is something that I am very interested in. When we think about the notion of translation, the first thing we need to do is to problematize the commonsensical understanding of translation. *The “trans-” which means “meta-” and “across-” takes place.*

It is really important to think about the term “trans-” in anything we do. According to common sense, “trans-” exists by one unity overcoming its own borders and passing into something different. But I think that if we take the notion of “trans-” in a much more fundamental sense, then that movement “trans-” precedes the establishment of that one entity involved in the translation. So, it is not as if, according to common sense, first we have English and Japanese, and there is translation between these things. In fact, translation does not come second. “Trans-” in translation comes before the establishment of the “identity” of the entities called Japanese language and English language. That involves “the entire reconceptualization of the world.”

I think that it is important when we think about “trans-” to realize that the question of “trans-lation” is not limited to language. Let’s think about what is called “intersubjectivity,” or in a certain sense, to refer to the topic Kazuma introduced in your paper, the question of “community.” In that sense, *this notion of “trans-” or “meta-” is*
related to the question of “com-,” which is to say: “with.” When we think about the “with” of trans-lation, we have English and Japanese somehow with-in each other. They are somehow coming together and having relationship with one another. And again, are we really doing justice to the complexities of that movement if we say that “translation” or “intersubjectivity” takes place only after the formation of these two distinct entities? — We are not: on the contrary, we are truly beginning to see the complexities of intersubjectivity and translation, when we think of the movement of “trans-” and “with” as not only preceding but constantly invading and constantly contaminating the establishment of “identity” of these two distinct entities. And I think if we think about translation in this latter sense, (I think that this is what Naoki does though he might not use these terms; but this is what he is still doing,) then, suddenly things become much more complex, and critical approach to everyday, standard, commonsensical notions of translation becomes much more powerful. Even in the field of Japan studies, translation is a major concept, and everyone thinks about translation because they are reading Japanese texts and basically writing in English. And yet, no one, except a few people, really thinks about it in a “conceptual” sense.

I think that it is necessary. If one is interested in speaking in other languages, then one should not complacently resist thinking about translation in a fundamental way. One has to do it. But if one does that, it is going to disturb a lot of one’s own prejudices, and it is also going to disturb other people because they did not want to hear this.