

For people who don't understand English with Japanese accent

Ghost in silence - Script

I was born in Japan and I have been living in Europe for over a decade. I am making art. I am doing art in a cross-cultural context, between the West and the East.

I've read an article saying that all good artists were migrants. The vast majority of the artists who left a significant impact on the twentieth-century crossed national boundaries during the course of their career once or more.

Wassily Kandinsky

Constantin Brancusi

Paul Klee

Joaquín Torres García

Sonia Delaunay

Marcel Duchamp

Kurt Schwitters

Hans Richter

Josef Albers

Sophie Taeuber-Arp

Man Ray

Naum Gabo

Max Ernst

Roberto Matta

László Moholy-Nagy

Alexander Calder

Louise Bourgeois

Meret Oppenheim

Maya Deren

Lygia Clark

Helio Oiticica

Jorge Orta

Öyvind Fahlström

Niki de Saint Phalle

Eva Hesse

Hannah Wilke

Sigmar Polke

Ana Mendieta

Tania Bruguera

Cecilia Vicuña

Carlos Cruz Díez

Jesús Rafael Soto

Liliana Porter

Luis Camnitzer

Wilfredo Lam

Félix González-Torres

George Balanchine

Ulises Carrión

Miguel-Ángel Cárdenas

James Joyce

Samuel Beckett

Raoul Ruiz

Amedeo Clemente Modigliani

Marlene Dumas

Nam June Paik

On Kawara

Yoko Ono

and probably many more.

ユーモアは、私の作品制作の中で、最も重要な要素の一つです。

日本からオランダに移住したとき、気づき始めました。毎回、自分のユーモアが、ヨーロッパの人たちに意図したように伝わらないのです。

私のジョークは空回りし、その言葉は、よく人々に混乱をもたらしました。なぜなら、別の文化背景で捉えられる際に、いくつかの意味が失われ、変化してしまうからです。けれども、この過程に面白い現象が現れます。誤ったジョークの解釈、それ自体が、全く別の面白さを生んでいるのです。

異文化間の両方の言葉の意味を理解することができる時、その解釈には矛盾が付きまといまいます。アーティストとして、この矛盾は、私の仕事の一部になっています。

The sense of humor is one of the most important elements within my art practice.

When I moved from Japan to the Netherlands, I started noticing that, every time I used my sense of humor, this didn't reach a European audience in the manner I intended.

My jokes came across differently, and people were often puzzled by my words, because certain meanings got lost in the process of being assigned into another cultural context.

However, an interesting phenomenon occurred in this process. Another humorous layer got created on top of this misinterpretation.

Whenever we have the ability to understand both meanings in this cross-cultural context, we allow ourselves to grasp a paradox in our understanding.

As an artist, I allow this paradox to be part of my work.

A few years ago, a Belgium guy decided to do research about the Japanese sense of humor and traveled to Japan. He met a Japanese woman there and told her an example of a European sarcastic joke about a rather boring concert.

‘Did you have fun last night? I think it was really really good!’

Then she answered.

“If you say that kind of joke, here we call it a lie“

西洋の文化は、ギリシャ哲学を基に成り立っています。西洋圏では、人々は、世界を理解したいという興味を常に持っているそうです。そのため、彼らは科学を発展させて、周囲を見渡し世界を理解するための、論理的な解釈をもたらそうとしました。

反対に、東アジアでは、世界は、コントロールするには不可解で複雑すぎる、と思われてきました。世界は常に変化していて、矛盾だらけです。そこでは、論理的な理解を深めるよりも、複雑さにその都度、対応してゆく事の方が、有効でした。そのため、対話形式や、短編の物語の方が、世界を理解するためには、適切だったのです。

Western civilization is based on the foundation of Greek philosophy. The Western stance towards life is that people have always had curiosity to understand the world. Therefore they have developed science resulting in a rather logical understanding to appreciate the world around them.

On the contrary, East-Asian stance toward life is that the world is too complex and obscure to control. It is constantly changing and is full of contradictions. From this stance, it is more useful to be able to cope with the complexity, continuously at every moment, rather than to have a logical understanding. Because of that, the style of dialogues or compiled short stories have become the most suitable way to make sense of the world.

The following is an example of obscure answers from a cryptic Zen dialogue.

“Why do you come to this place?”
“To seek enlightenment”
“Why have you not found it?”
“Because I seek it”
“How will you find it?”
“By not seeking”
“Where will you find it?”
“In no place.”
“When will you find it?”
“At no time.”

The writing system of the Japanese language consists of three main components. One of them is “kanji” which is of Chinese origins. For this reason, as a Japanese person, I am able to understand quite a few Chinese characters which all have individual meanings.

ひらがな(Only developed in Japan) カタカナ(Used for transcription of foreign words)
漢字(Adopted Chinese characters)

In Chinese, the word 'humor' is written in the combination of 2 Chinese characters, 幽 (yōu) which literally means “Ghostly” and 默 (mò) which literally means “Silence”. This modern Chinese word was created by a bilingual writer, Lin Yutang, who was called a *Master of Chinese humor* after his activities in the 1930's Shanghai literary scene. He recorded that there was no Chinese equivalent for the English word 'humor'. Therefore he created the phonetic equivalent yōumò (yōumò) by using two vague meanings of Chinese characters, ghostly and silence. I believe, it was a sign of his poetical intervention.

The sense of humor in Chinese and Japanese is very vague, almost impossible to grasp, but there must be something existing in this silence.

Inspired by Lin Yutang, I would like to translate 幽默 (yōu mò) as 'Ghost in Silence'.

日本の幽霊には、昔から足がありません。西洋の幽霊に足はありますが、透明です。

Japanese ghosts have traditionally no feet. Western ghosts have feet but are transparent.

Once my German music teacher asked me why I pause the music at the position of the rest sign that I had added in the music score. I couldn't answer because I didn't use the rest sign as an indication to pause the music, rather I meant to insert silence into the music. According to my teacher, the functionality of the rest sign is to halt the flow of music and not to present silence.

But silence has meanings in my country and there is no sign of silence in musical notation.

Silence can exist without speech, but speech can't exist without silence. The word would be without depth, if the background of silence was missing.

一般的に、ユーモアは笑いを引き起こし、楽しみを与えてくれます。そして結果として、幸せな気持ちを引き起こします。アメリカの専門的な研究によると、このイメージが、典型的な日本人の幸せの表情とのことです。

In general, humor provokes laughter and provides amusement. And as a result, it evokes feeling of happiness. According to an American scientific research, this image is the typical Japanese expression of happiness.

この表情を、エモーティコン(顔文字)に翻訳してみたいと思います。顔文字は、エモーション(表情)とアイコン(偶像)の組み合わせからできています。普通の使い方では、幸せの顔文字は、頭が左に傾き、こうなります。

:-) :)

日本人は、この絵文字を独自に発展させて、このようにしました。

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これが幸せの顔か、と聞かれれば、個人的には、何か別の表情に見えてきます。

今日のインターネット上のコミュニケーションでは、日本の幸せの偶像は、連鎖反応で発展し、巧みな操作の繰り返しの後、変化し続け、曖昧ではっきりしなくなりました。

I would like to translate this happiness into Emoticons, a combination of the words “emotion” and “icon”. In common use, the happiness emoticon is like this, tilting one's head to the left.

:-) :)

Japanese users have developed them in a peculiar manner. Their happiness emoticons are like this.

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(^▽^)/

(>w<) (≧▽≧)

(>~<):(;>_<)

Do you really see them as happy faces? I've personally started to see them as expressions of something else. In today's world of cyber communication, the Japanese icon of happiness has developed like a chain reaction. After repeated manipulations, I see that the emotion of happiness has changed, becoming neutral, almost obscure.

These are pictures of the Chinese monks; known as *Hanshan* and *Shide* in China and as *Kanzan* and *Jittoku* in Japan. *Hanshan* is a legendary figure associated with a collection of poems from the 9th century in the Taoist and Zen tradition, and *Shide* is his close friend. No one knows who they were, or when they lived and died. However everybody knows them as laughing characters, since they were depicted in many paintings having such an expression.

After the 13th century, Japanese painters also began to draw them. How to depict their ambiguous laughter became a trend in the Japanese art world. Their laughter is very mysterious and enchanting since people find happiness as well as sadness in their expression.

幸せの反対の絵文字を調べてみます。
普通の使い方では、不幸の絵文字はこうです。

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日本では、不幸の絵文字はこうなります。

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個人的には、笑っている顔に見えます。

Let us check the opposition of happiness within emoticons.

In the common use, the unhappiness emoticon is like this.

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In Japan, unhappiness emotion looks like this.

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Personally, I see them as laughing faces.

日本のユーモアについての研究の過程で、2013年に公開された「謝罪の王様」というコメディ映画に興味がありました。謝罪という行為、特に伝統的な日本の謝罪方法、「土下座」に魅了された男の話です。

私が見つけたこの写真は、土下座の使い方を説明するのに良い例だと思います。TEPCOの経営責任者達が、福島第一原子力発電所事故の被害者に謝罪をしています。写真から読み取れるように、この瞬間はとても重要で、彼らは、非常に申し訳なさそうにしています。

During my research about Japanese humor, I got interested in one comedy movie called “The Apology King” released in 2013. This is a story of a man who is fascinated with act of apology, especially, the utmost traditional Japanese one, called “*Dogeza*”.

This picture I've found is a good example to explain the usage of *Dogeza*. The CEOs of Tokyo Electric Power Company were apologizing to the victims of the Fukushima power plant accident. As you can see from the image, this moment is very serious and they show that they are extremely sorry.

しかしながら、このコメディ映画の中では、土下座をする男はどのように描かれています。風刺画調のオーバーリアクションが、彼を面白おかしく見せています。彼が、外交官として謝罪のために隣国に送られた時、その国では、土下座が全く逆の意味を持っていて、現地の人には、侮辱として受け取られてしまいます。そのため、彼の土下座は両国の間の紛争をさらに大きくしてしまうのです。

どんな物事の意味も、見方によっては、簡単に裏返ってしまいます。そして、このメカニズムを、大多数のコメディが、笑いを誘い出す方法として使用しています。

However, in the comedy story, the man who plays *Dogeza* is portrayed like this.

A caricatured overreaction makes him look funny. When he is sent to apologize to a primitive foreign country to do *Dogeza* as a diplomat, here *Dogeza* had an opposite meaning and was seen as an insult from the local people. So, his act of apology caused even a bigger conflict between the two countries.

Any meaning can easily flip around depending on one's perspective. And this is exactly what provokes laughter in most comedy stories.

The most common word we use to apologize is sorry.

And this word- "Sorry" - has multiple meanings and usages. For instance, in the Japanese society, in order to show your respect to another person, you put yourself down by saying “sorry”. When you put yourself in a lower position, the position of the other becomes higher than yours.

So, by saying sorry in the conversation, you are actually showing your respect to that person. To be polite, it is very important that the other person replies back the word “sorry”. After both people have shown mutual respect to each other by saying “sorry”, then they both have an equal position again. This is how and why we repeat the word “sorry”.

If one would not understand this peculiar manner, “sorry” will be perceived as an apology.

However, from a specific angle, it is a manner to properly greet each other.

大多数のユーモラスなジョークは、社会的機能を備えています。ヨーロッパ人は、よく見知らぬ人に自分を紹介する道具としてジョークを使います。けれども、日本人は、友達になり、打ち解けた時にだけジョークを言う傾向にあり、初めて会った相手とは、適度な距離を取ることを好みます。例えば、謙遜や敬意を見せながら、「すみません」という言葉を一番初めに口にして。

何年前、「日本との異文化交流」と名付けられた学術会議で、アメリカの研究者がこう述べました。

「もしアメリカ人の観客しかここにいなかったら、私は講義をジョークから始めるでしょう。けれども、もし日本人の観客しかいなかったら、謝罪の言葉から始める方が得策です。」

そして今、私がこの物語を、様々な人がいる中で終わらせるにあたって、ジョークを言わないことに対して、英語で謝らせてください。

Most humorous jokes have a sort of social function. People often use jokes as social tools to introduce themselves to strangers. However, Japanese tend to make jokes only after the strangers have become their friends. When a Japanese person meets someone for the first time, one prefers to clarify the distance between oneself and the stranger by showing humbleness and respect. For example, by saying the word 'sorry' at first.

A few years ago, in a conference entitled 'Intercultural encounters with Japan', one American researcher stated as follow:

If there was an all-American audience, I might begin my presentation with a joke. However if there was an all-Japanese audience, I might better begin with an apology.

And for me now, to end this narration in front of a mixed group of people, let me please apologize for not making a joke in English.

アイ・アム・ソーリー

I am sorry.

I don't think my "Sorry" with the Japanese accent is the same sorry with your English accent.

ソーリー ≠ Sorry

私の英語は、永遠に日本語なまりで、これが私の標準言語です。

I will forever keep my Japanese accent in my English, and this is the standard language of my communication.

(ソーリー) Sorry

I behave like a Westerner after being away so long.

ソーリー [Sorry]

かつて私の国は、西洋に追いつけ追い越せと東アジアで帝国になろうとしました。

Once my country tried to be an empire in East-Asia to catch up with and surpass the West.

「ソーリー」 Sorry

I was not yet born in the time of the Second World War but I have to apologize as a Japanese to the neighborhood countries.

ソーリー ‘Sorry’

私の国は、東洋に位置しているにもかかわらず、西洋の一国として数えられています。なぜなら、経済的には西洋圏だからです。

My country is counted as a Western one even though it is located in the East, because we are economically in the West.

『ソーリー』 Sorry

I think I am a leftist but the leftists in my country call me a rightwing.

ソーリー “Sorry”

私の国から流れた放射能汚染水は、海を通して西洋と東洋の境（垣根）を超えてゆきます。

The radioactive water from my country crosses the divide between the west and the east in the pacific ocean.

<ソーリー> Sorry

I try to apologize with the Japanese emoticon, but you might recognize them as smiling faces.

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自分の行為を謝りたいと思うけれど、もう一度同じことをするかもしれません。その時は、もう一度謝ります。

I apologize for my deed (act) but I might do the same again. Then I will apologize again.

ソーリー x Sorry ...

I am greeting as well as apologizing.

My narrative is a ghost.

All that we say is going to dissolve into silence.