“In Lieu of Eulogies: Post-Mortem on the Hideki Richard Okada Critical Pedagogies Panel”

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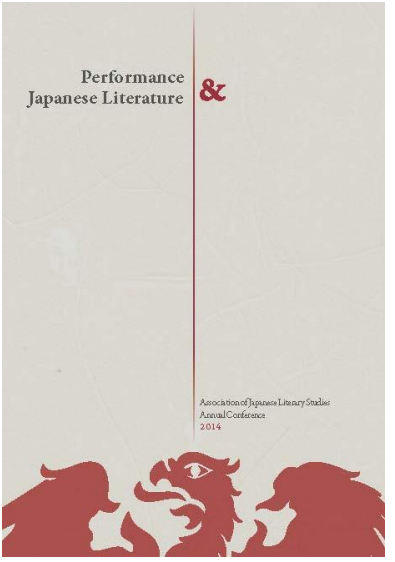

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Post-Mortem on the Hideki Richard Okada Critical Pedagogies Panel

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Opening Notes

This panel began as an occasion to convene a public conversation among scholars I respected about Hideki Richard Okada's work and his teaching, especially. My initial idea was to have people who knew him at different stages of his life and in different capacities—as a graduate student or as a colleague, say—gather to talk about his approach to teaching. ("Approach" might actually suggest a level of overt structuring that's inapt in his case, but more on that in a bit.) Considering that AJLS as I've known it has tended to focus less on teaching than the research end of things, I thought such an opportunity to consider the question of "critical pedagogies" under the aegis of a memorial panel would also represent a welcome departure from the chains of twenty-minute papers on Japanese literature we usually present.

I didn't ask the discussants to submit titles. This wasn't out of oversight. Part of the reason is that I imagined we'd have a live conversation as opposed to formal presentations. Plus, the absence of titles was a bit of an inside joke since Hideki never made syllabi for graduate seminars. As such, the lack of titles was in keeping with his wayward spirit. Similarly, when I contacted Jim Fujii, Christine Marran, and Steve Chung—all of whom were interested in participating but also wary of how best to contribute—the only direction I gave them was that whatever they shared should address the topic of teaching in some way and that it had to be sincere.

The goal was never to mourn Hideki in public. The memorial service held at Princeton on April 21, 2012 had been more or less devised to do that. Rather, this panel would provide an opportunity to think aloud about teaching as a style of commitment and would clear a space to consider Hideki/Richard/Okada as an intellectual problem: theorize the formation of his pedagogical talents and proclivities rather than merely eulogize him as "the deceased." To my mind, the mournful stretch had passed and this would be a chance to recount—absent any candy-glaze—our sense of a friend and colleague's method and madness both. This would be more genealogy than eulogy, and would assess his influence with a critical candor that he epitomized in his best moments. I'm not sure that we succeeded, but this was what I had in mind, at least.

Ephemerality, discipline, and space are the three main concepts that frame these thoughts on teaching. At the center of my comments about Hideki's critical pedagogy sits the question of how and with what intensity we spend our time. Where we spend it—which is to say, questions of space—anchor that

core temporal emphasis. The question of "discipline" links the spatial and the temporal as both "academic territory" and as "method."

Ephemerality circulates as a central conceptual problem within performance studies; I'd like to transpose some of that conceptual energy to the site of this post-mortem meditation. As a scholar of performance I spend a good deal of time thinking about ephemerality and disappearance, examining the logic of what perishes or lives on as informed by Peggy Phelan and Diana Taylor's notions of ontology, archive, and the politics of representation. But there's ephemeral and then there's *ephemeral*: death in theory and dying as it incises embodiment's daily practice. Hence this essay represents an attempt to dwell with residual lessons that outlast the lives of those who taught them. The take home point here is as follows: Life is too short to spend it doing things that don't truly move us.

Echoes of Expertise

How should we live our lives? How should we perform our work? Permutations of these questions ripple in the gap between Sakuma's sounding and Okada's teaching. Sakuma's performance brought these questions into relief as only the best performances and theory can. He'll never share a canon with J.L. Austin or Eve Sedgwick, but his clear-sighted, thoughtful blog embodies performance theory at its most personal. I think of Barthes' *Mourning Diary*, for instance, though Sakuma's prose is far less maudlin and ornate than that. His unadorned writing resonates. That forthright quality carries through in the performance he gave as well as in his online diary of more than a thousand songs, "Goodnight to Followers," recorded daily since 2010.

As a guitarist, watching and listening to Sakuma was surreal. Because I'd long ago been seduced by the pyrotechnics of Stevie Ray Vaughan and Eddie Van Halen—those avatars of the "thermonuclear white masculinity" Charles Schaar Murray derides in his *Crosstown Traffic*—Sakuma's halting, fuzz-laden phrases fazed me some. While I'll always have a soft spot for the heroics that awed me at fifteen, their 80's swagger looks dented now, or at least laden with too much excess—of notes, of force. Those sounds issue from a region I'm increasingly less interested in visiting.

Pops Staples and Curtis Mayfield enthrall me more now: songs like "I'm So Proud" and "Think." Even though Sakuma's style lay more in a David Gilmour vein, his playing reminded me that leaving more space between notes and exercising slowness without having the verses' tension drop requires its own covert ethos. In this context urgency comes from a lyrical or rhythmic emphasis rather than from how many sixteenths one can cram to the bar. More than this, a judicious sense of what matters most builds sonic impact. Likewise, the artistic resolve to record a new composition nearly every day and share it with comrades imbues Sakuma's music with the gravity of steady practice. These qualities surpass the mere business of serving the song; they intersect the very

task of living itself.

Sakuma's performance became a cipher through which to think through a wealth of issues, from mortality to the difficulties of succeeding at the pursuits we hold dear, often despite our best efforts. Here he was onstage, the cancer and surgery having gnawed his prowess, playing the best he could despite that loss of skill. His solos grieved finesse. They bespoke a life of learning to shape sound he'd lost access to but still kept precious parings of. What we heard peal through the I-House auditorium were notes fraying in Sakuma's hands as he tried to stitch them lucid. Each pitch sought mattered all the more because nothing could guarantee he'd hit it.

The fragility of his frame juxtaposed against the deliberate efforts he made to express himself fluidly—even as his fingers glitched—moves me to consider more deeply the bodies through which we perform our work. Whatever form that work might assume, taking for granted our bodies' capacity to carry it out comes easy much of the time. Bodies soaked with all kinds of tendencies and valuations, natural and cultural; bodies ill or otherwise, fully-operative or impaired; smooth or wizened; they serve to extend or impede our will. Sakuma's wholehearted attempt to actuate the sounds in his mind accentuated the gap between what we mean to convey and what actually materializes in the air. In Sakuma's case any notion of technique was suddenly no longer relevant because he was playing for his life:

> When it got to be about three hours before the show, suddenly the brain ailment surfaced. My left arm and hand's spatial perception (*te no kûkan ninshiki*) went weird. I tried playing in the dressing room, but couldn't play straight. Up until show time it would return to normal or crop up now and again, over and over. There was nothing I could do but place my fate in heaven's hands and hope for the best.

The blog post from which this excerpt comes, entitled "Goodbye World," theorizes performance, albeit in a form that doesn't announce its status as theory. Writing the above on August 9, 2013, two months before his packed I-House concert with Hayakawa Yoshio and five months before his passing on January 16, 2014, Sakuma describes his physical decline in relation to what he used to be able to do and what he knows he should still be able to pull off. But the deterioration of his body compromised the "spatial perception" of his hands, making it difficult to produce on his instrument the sounds he intended. To be sure, illness can be a metaphor but sometimes it shreds figuration. Disease changed the way space felt, disorganizing the manner in which it formerly made sense, and literally forcing him to recalibrate how he might grasp it. In this way, illness revised Sakuma's relation not only to the guitar, but also to himself, prompting existential questions raised elsewhere in the post:

> *Yaritai koto, yaranakereba naranai koto, yarikaketa koto, mamoritai mono/hito, tsutaetakatta koto/omoi, ga takusan aru. Sorera wo dou shitara ii no ka, imada ni kaimoko kentou ha tsuite inai.*
>
> There are many things I want to do, things I have to do, unfinished things I've started, things/people I want to protect, things/ideas I wanted to convey. What to do about those things, I still haven't the faintest clue.

Sakuma's phrasing in "Goodbye World" suggests an awareness and plain-spoken acceptance of his impending death. The passage speaks to his status as a musician, father, and friend, as well as to his inability to fathom how best to proceed given the limited time he has left.

Notably, given Sakuma's determination and wherewithal, the cancers' effects didn't make musical expression impossible. Rather, they estranged the process, kneading toward something more oblique. What portion of his delicate vibrato was natural? Had the tremors we heard wriggled free of cancer's maw or were they artifacts of a recent neurosurgery? Gilmourish sustain buoyed string-bends as they lilted sharp or flat. Their effect was striking in its own way but a far cry from ideal, judging by Sakuma's strain as his gaunt fist loitered along the rosewood fingerboard.

Sakuma's touch—with its rubato intensity—evokes facets of Okada's classroom practice. With Okada seminar held a heady mix of urgency and luxury, as though every phrase came to occupy its own knoll of attention, while all the time in the world was available to trawl the contours of a couplet. On this score, Okada's seminars could be free-form and yet rigorously immediate at the same time. A lot hinged on that immediacy, much as the Sakuma performance did, where the recourse to orthodox skill mattered less than the endeavor to lay something on the line that was neither prepackaged nor certain to pay off. The two men share other traits as well: the thin frame, glasses, the thoughtfulness, the Japanese ancestry, and the cancer.

As for their differences, I think of Sakuma's forthright stoicism versus Okada's stubborn vanity about hiding the rate at which his body was breaking down. Indeed both men embraced the ephemeral nature of life in their own way, on their respective public or private stages. I think of the two men's divergent approaches: the tranquil fatalism Sakuma aired alongside Hideki's engrossing restlessness. In this there was a certain obliviousness of Hideki's that hits me in hindsight. Call it a mix of childlike arrogance and naiveté about having either a surplus of time or not a second to spare. There seemed to be little space between these poles, with the result that sometimes getting time to talk outside of that seminar space was either ample or absurdly clipped: a dizzying all or nothing. As though for him to engage fully outside that space would be to somehow cede

an overriding investment in another, more privileged span of interaction in class at his seminar table. The sheer amount of ideas exchanged there foregrounds the extent to which spatial parameters reinforce or undercut critical imagination.

Making Space at The Table

Okada's office was for me at least a very special space, and to speak of that space is to speak of The Table. The Table stood in stark contrast to The Desk. Cluttered before class, The Table often looked lunatic but could at least be tamed in a minute or two to accommodate guests; The Desk was perpetually a fire-hazardous Jenga fort of printed matter liable to disperse at any second. At the seminar Table the gesture of clearing space counted a great deal. It became a cleared space but never a hollow one. The previous day's (or month's?) debris would be swept from that surface for that session, and we'd all have at it: place texts on the table and ply them 'til the chassis split. I'm still amazed that the process never appeared to get old for him: every writing always held the potential for a fresh start. These were texts he'd reread dozens of times and yet he'd open the *zenshû* volume up and look it over like its pages' ink was still moist. "So? Where do you want to begin? Should we just start at the beginning?" he'd say, polling the room with wide eyes. We always did, but somehow it never felt as though we ever had to.

There was no agenda but to read closely, contribute something interesting, and then try to sustain that communal interest. Whatever developed felt organic because there was no fear about it petering out. Because even as an idea's potency dwindled, the energy of its passing just assumed another shape as it passed hands and fed a new rendition. All those other books on the shelves that surrounded us were just possible routes to what transpired on that day and time. The discussion determined what to pull from the shelf—only if it was useful and served the moment—not because precedent required it of us.

Within Okada's office The Table ushered a flow of ideas. It could also be a breakfast table for the 9AM seminars, where, following Hideki's conversion to organic food connoisseur, I could be chided for eating deep-fried hashbrowns and several nitrate-rich sausages, but still respected for what I said—regardless of its fat or sodium content. For me this was a space that cancelled fear, since even the most fragile conjectures still emitted forces that registered in the room. Every session granted an opportunity to test what worked and what didn't as we combed concepts for their link to our current thread and tried to eye them squarely.

For better or worse, there was no artifice. This meant that the excitement was tangible because it was genuine. His comments could range from the acerbic, toward the coaxing, to the "incandescent," in Miyabi Goto's phrasing. But despite their mercurial character they never felt insincere. Hideki could be irascible and unreasonable even as his argumentative acumen shone through, and then childlike-sunny again once we crossed an unusually juicy passage. This

stochastic quality could prove wondrous in seminar as it veered from pensive nods of encouragement or fist-pounding as diffident ideas wavered into reach.

Sometimes when things got going, the pace mounted, and we nicked the edges of something big, Okada would pound The Table. As though flesh on wood might help drum the concept's crowning slivers out. Knowingly comic in its own right, the pounding gesture embodied an urgency of not having time for bad or disingenuous ideas, but always having time and energy to make ideas *better*. There was no "best" because there was no clear telos (or syllabus, for that matter), nor any conclusive rubric for judging ideas.

Once opened at The Table our texts renewed that interval in which we were encouraged to think aloud. Together, we'd assemble a provisional space for that session and then let it dissolve after the three-hour moment had passed, before returning to retry it all again the following week. If one wanted to talk about ecology, then dwelling with this space and assessing its strengths would be one way to do it. "Reduce, Reuse, Recycle," printed on a sheet of paper push-pinned into the corkboard outside his door, became an axiom: stressing the cyclical, but advancing steadily, propelled by an ethic—minus a map. What this meant in practice was that the exercise of unspooling readings as we went along could disorient, feeling either spectacularly principled or spectacularly negligent.

In retrospect some of the character of those sessions seems irresponsible or unprofessional, and to be sure, Hideki could certainly be both of these. The Table became a vehicle through which to practice a kind of indiscipline that could veer from something fumbling to something assured and back again. But perhaps most importantly, The Table could become a place to interrupt: the monotony of a school week; a set of assumptions about literature, history, and subjectivity; or at a larger level, the legacies of entrenched discipline whose productivity could veil its virulent effects.

And it's at this juncture that metaphorical and literal spaces overlap. For viewed from another perspective, the indiscipline Hideki rehearsed represented less a propensity for negligence than an attempt at restitution. Anchored by The Table, the seminar space countered many of the ones Richard experienced throughout his life and graduate career, in particular. In contrast to these negative examples, he fashioned a tiny corner of Undercommons to resist curricular conventiones that he felt stifled creative critical thinking.

Constraints and Expanses We Inherit

On this score my take emerges less from a desire to be generous in my reminiscence of graduate school than it does from a sense of the extent to which a thicker history conditioned the seminar we learned to inhabit. A charitable reading such as the one Jim Fujii's piece in this volume posits might interpret the disregard for rote linearity as evidence of the principled defiance he ascribes to Richard. Pushing further, a reading that grants a similar benefit of the doubt

might sketch a genealogy of this indiscipline in an attempt to suggest the lines of affiliation that quietly laid the foundation for that charged seminar space. Those bad Berkeley days Richard lived through emitted negative energy that was refurbished toward more positive ends in that office with the broad table liable to be buried by books or wiped clean at any given moment. When bordered by friends, The Table helped sublimate the scarring experiences of his graduate school career and the decades that preceded them: reduce the grief they caused to propose better trajectories of critical engagement.

To talk a bit about this background is not to apologize or mythologize but rather to historicize a connection to that formative institutional context as a frame for the space Hideki worked to build in his best seminars. There are any number of questions that seem imprudent or uncomfortable to ask, such as those that foreground the dubious desire to discipline (not to mention the tacit fears that can underwrite that desire). Indeed we often forget the extent to which the spaces we inhabit condition the questions we're most inclined to ask—or overlook. For Richard, the silo that was Oriental Languages (OL) foreclosed the exigent questions about language, history, and power that then captivated him. (See David Palumbo-Liu's "Crossing the Lines" for more on the culture of "Oh, Hell" in the seventies.)

Theory thus became a means of escape. At a superficial level it comprised a range of critical thinking whose nourishing alternatives were preferable to the stale rations habitually doled out. But at a deeper level theory supplied tactics for surviving a toxic intellectual atmosphere. To hear Okada or Miyoshi narrate it the diverse thinking beginning to flourish in other departments on campus, not to mention the activist political consciousness burgeoning within other sectors of the broader Berkeley community, were maligned within Oriental Languages, which disparaged them as marginal to the immediate area of specialization and the educational mission at hand. From this official standpoint, theoretical and worldly concerns were akin to invasive species whose incursion was to be either adamantly ignored or quashed lest it derail business as usual. Remember that this was before interdisciplinary scholarship had landed the cachet it boasts today, back when ethnic, gender, postcolonial and performance studies' nascent interventions were still struggling to congeal within the U.S. academy. The "post-" had yet to fasten firmly to terms like structuralism or colonialism, and areas like premodern Japanese literary studies were effectively administered as garrisons assigned to hold the wider world at bay.

In retrospect, such occupied institutional territory presents a setting in which to ask after what might be called the ecological repercussions of pedagogical systems. After all, some classrooms' atmosphere can prove toxic—often unwittingly, but not always. Long before cancer claimed him, Richard the graduate student tried his best to maneuver amidst what could only have felt like the intellectual equivalent of slow death. This was decades before the student-led sit-in to hire Asian-American faculty and establish Asian-American studies at

Princeton (see "Areas, Disciplines, and Ethnicity," in *Learning Places*); before the Graduate Mentoring Award he received in 2008, or his turn to ecology. This was also before the interest in composting developed, prompting the appearance of a monochrome "Reduce, Reuse, Recycle" printout outside his office door, affixed like a sigil. This flag didn't wave, and yet its rounded triangle of arrows traced a circuitous route toward reinvention.

I understand now that Richard had to literally escape the territory of Oriental Languages and locate other spaces in which to ask the questions that compelled him—regardless of whether or not they had answers, and irrespective of whether or not the prevailing authorities deemed those questions licit. Because his body in that time and that place was overwhelmingly prone to being apprehended in reductive terms: policed and misrecognized as an object, if not a native to be processed by the Cold War learning machine. He was an object learning to be a subject, but wary of becoming *too* subject—disproportionately disciplined—in the bargain. Walking the tightrope between subjectivity and subjection was and is a tricky thing. I can imagine that his presence might have undermined the very faith in an objective, disembodied scholarship within which the most technocratic notions of disciplinary expertise lodged. In such environs Theory helped him find his footing as a student and pursue both a personhood and an intellectual scope that exceeded any single department, area, or disciplinary perimeter. In short, it lent a fugitive means through which to bypass the insularity of state-sanctioned area study to access worlds more expansive than the sites he'd inherited.

Vital Counterpoint

In some ways Hideki's scholarship was concerned deeply, if not always explicitly, with language's relation to space. One thing that drove his work was a determination to articulate the pervasive and often pernicious extent to which space—discursive and otherwise—answered to demands for hierarchy, transparency, and deadened thought. His chosen task as a critic was to give account of how textual figuration resisted such demands. Even if that annexed space couldn't be fully reclaimed, its mechanisms had to be confronted, delineated carefully, and somehow countered. Having grown allergic to the strains of disciplinary violence that fostered positivism, he tried to inoculate those of us who'd listen against the hazards of becoming conceptually numbed.

Before he sought refuge with Miyoshi, Okada worked under Helen McCullough, graduate of the U.S. Navy Language School and prolific translator of classical Japanese literature. Tensions developed between the graduate student committed to exploring the possibilities of classical Japanese literature and the teacher who once wrote, "I do not believe Japan has produced a great literary corpus, or that it can boast a single undisputed literary masterpiece, or that very many works of classical Japanese literature can stand up to sustained, intensive literary criticism" (letter dated 12 July, 1978, later released to Berkeley campus

newspaper for publication, quoted in Miyoshi, *Off-Center: Power and Culture Relations Between Japan and the United States*, 12). Hence other spaces had to be sought and built to accommodate the "sustained, intensive literary criticism" thought unviable by some.

Seminar was therefore tacitly positioned as the antithesis of the McCullough dungeon: a site which for him epitomized a vacuum of imagination, worldliness, and critical thinking at its most expert. I'm now convinced that our lean-to was leveraged against that domain. Contrapuntal to that other place and time, our seminars were designed to be as unscripted as possible. So, anything was fair game as long as it relied on perceptive reading, kept attentive to the conditions under which a text had been produced, and was put forth in a thoughtful manner that opened that text. This last condition was perhaps the most important one. What you offered at The Table didn't have to be fully formed but it had to reach somehow, and had to be genuine. One could test readings and experiment freely, but not irresponsibly. Indeed having something too worked out ahead of time usually meant that the offering was stale, too hermetic to be of much workable conceptual use. These kinds of ideas were often just readymade baubles whose prim exterior hid their void. Being in fact unresponsive to the amplitude of the text and the interval in which we'd gathered to engage it, they were careless in the way they hitched that text to a stagnant hermeneutic. Okada had little patience for this kind of premature foreclosure. Accidental misreadings could be forgiven, but to be complacent, unimaginative, or phony counted as high crimes.

While objectives were rarely articulated outright, primary among the unstated goals was learning how to become your own thinker. At his best, Hideki furnished a space in which to rehearse a personal style of engaging with texts that I found infectious. As part of this provision the act of clearing space—literally, as it was almost always overrun by books and notes—strikes me now as being especially symbolic. Clearing space was a fundamental component of what Hideki did, even if it was too haphazard to qualify as a long-term strategy per se. His method was a patchwork of principles, tics, and more than a couple ambitions that flickered across the span of a class session or semester.

Considering Jim Fujii's take, this tangle of tendencies might approximate a sample of the "transversal thinking" he credits Hideki with. To be sure, Hideki had a remarkable talent for coming to texts he'd read dozens of times as though they were brand new. His re-readings were a product of that uncharted moment entered with those of us in that room on that day for those three hours. Far more often than not, they felt improvisatory in a good way, with some admissibly sour notes here and there. The point I'd want to underscore is that what was assembled in that space, as sinuous or unwieldy as it could be, carried an organic vitality I've seldom experienced. The edges of this hypnotic nameless thing were always shifting such that while grammatical points were clarified, we'd often accrue more questions than answers by session's end. Consolidation was never

the goal: the conversation would routinely ribbon out in centrifugal fashion. To name this pedagogy proper implies a degree of conscious regimentation incongruous with the venue's feel. It seems fair, though, to posit the presence of an untimeliness that energized the tensile nature of the space.

No Time for Excellence

I am positive that the Berkeley background Jim Fujii mentions played a major role insofar as Hideki's trials in the Oriental Languages department there annihilated any belief in structure for structure's sake. That territory taught him by negative example how crucial it was to preserve spaces that were more generative and open. Similarly, anything resembling slavish obedience to precedent was scorned, along with faith in the merits of professional apprenticeship. Whatever space and time we students inherited slid counter to the strictures that for him had felt most oppressive about Oriental Languages. In this sense, indiscipline in the classroom became a way to retrospectively redress infractions wrought before our time. Indiscipline held the potential to revise and even resurrect opportunities that had perished decades prior. Perhaps Okada's office was a space in which an unspoken mourning animated the improvisatory present of our classroom discussions. Arrayed around The Table we could work in ways that exerted some reparative energy toward scars suffered ages prior to our seminar's scheduled hour.

Genji elaborates the drama that breeds as bloodlines knot. Having written a book on *Genji* I think about legacy a lot now, as a theme in the tale but particularly in relation to genealogy and academic discipline as it molds our perception of a past that's more than merely discursive and always embodied at some level. I have in mind things like notions of expertise as it was once associated closely with skills of decoding and wartime translation; or the ways in which such expertise could also prove useful in divorcing oneself from the political fronts of the historical present in order to ensconce oneself within a pre-modern enclave.

Different institutional spaces foster different regimes of assessment or violence, often hosting proprietary attitudes toward expertise as a guarantor of the "excellence" Bill Readings condemns. OL installed itself as an early bulwark of excellence; factions within it opposed the momentous groundswell of the 1970's. At its best, OL as Richard experienced it trained scholars to perform advanced research on East Asia. At its worst, it was a colonialist outpost: an institutional setting where translation could become an alibi for excluding the worldly in favor of a flawless elsewhere that was more manageably and apolitically remote.

What does this regimentation of space have to do with time? Well, one thing to point out is the way in which asking questions about the disciplinary nature of time in certain institutional contexts, at particular historical moments, can incur harsh marginalization and even expulsion. As it happens, Okada wrote a paper on time: specifically, a seminar paper on time to degree with the

Oriental Languages department at Berkeley. It was an unprecedented gesture at the time, and neither elegant nor charitable. (For the details, I direct the reader to the interview "A Conversation with Masao Miyoshi" in *Trespasses*.) Now that we've become accustomed to the incessant administrative refrain of cutting doctoral students' time to degree, we might skim past the novelty of raising such a question more than 30 years ago. It's difficult to imagine the extent to which such a simple question could strike so raw a nerve. And yet the response to the posing of such a question—a failing grade and thus a withdrawal of funding tantamount to expulsion—exposed a glaring problem with the way in which time was being overseen in that sector of the Ivory Tower.

To ask questions of a certain tenor—about the nature of duration, its institutional mismanagement, and its prejudicial bent—was to assert otherwise by probing the unspoken mechanisms by which this engine of discipline sought to reproduce itself without end. Time was out of joint, and to make an analytical object of time to degree punctured the assumption that all was as it should be, running smoothly and equitably. To underscore this tortuous duration was to expose it as a problem and dispute its validity. To ask in a pointed fashion, "Why so long?" in other words, cast an icy floodlight on a stark naked emperor—one whose decrees were scrawled in pencil, no less!

These graphite guidelines governing departmental conduct and policy return us to the matter of ephemerality. To have the department's policies in pencil meant provisional markings that served as a vehicle for abusing power at the author's whim. The diaphanous nature of histories like these is lamentable in part because in some cases the very people who were most culpable preferred the transient nature of the medium. Pencil meant a diaphanous target that could be altered to suit the prerogative of those who held the privilege to issue dictates without censure. This also meant not having to provide a harder target for the injured party to cite in their pursuit of just treatment.

The very flimsiness of those provisional dictates was what necessitated such violence to disavow the question's threat. Expulsion was the only answer because to not expel the abject was to poison the system with a corrosive doubt, not to mention further risk of insubordinate curiosity. Indecorous inquiry had to be crushed. No one in the scenario was naïve, I'm sure. I don't doubt that there was some desire to needle his supervisors that laced Richard's points in the essay. But I also don't doubt that the decision to expel the student who penned that essay struck a retributive extreme.

Styles of Attachment and Dissent

I remember a disagreement Okada and I had near the end of my time in graduate school. I was reading *A Thousand Plateaus* and had gotten to the section on "bodies without organs." Something felt off to me there. I'm all for a good metaphor but it seemed like a fantasy of transcending the territorialized body that was also marked by an unstated privilege to think the body outside the

prospect of actual corporal seizure; parts of the work presumed a subjectivity and freedom of movement that warranted skeptical inspection. Granted, this was before I'd learned of exhibits like *Bodies Revealed*, the spectacular cadavers of which were culled at a discount from the disposable corpses of Chinese prisoners. However, a Toni Morrison seminar had me reading *Playing in the Dark* and *Beloved*, both of whose insights on history and embodiment framed *Plateaus* in a new light. In trying to explain my growing misgivings to an Okada that seemed unwilling to consider this gap between theory and practice, I said something like, "Some bodies are more striated than others... and that's not Deleuze and Guattari's fault, but it's just true." ("Just" is a greasy adverb, as it pilfers unearned certainty, and I'm sure that's part of what bothered him.) For him my take represented a perversion of the theory to the extent that identity politics marred its larger aspirations. I'd tainted the theorists' concept unfairly by asking about its motivating assumptions about whiteness, privilege, and mobility. Maybe I was missing something, but I didn't quite trust it at the time, nor could I sit easy with the rush to guzzle a rhetoric of intensifying planar flows that seemed to bypass grim conditions on the ground. Call me old fashioned, but they made me miss Gramsci.

More puzzling to me at the time was the fact that he was the one who'd taught me to ask these very types of questions he now seemed reluctant to entertain. Not just "What are they saying?" and "How are they building their argument?," but "Where were they trained? Who were their teachers? Who's thanked in the Acknowledgments? What press published the book? Who wrote the endorsements on the back cover?" Plus the ever-present pair: "What's at stake?" and "What's left unstated?" Given this background it felt as though much of his pushback had more to do with defending the theoretical gesture itself, over and above the theory's individual merits.

This was a blindspot of Okada's that frustrated me sometimes. He could be argued with on this or that point, or talked down. Given time he might even come around. But it has occurred to me in hindsight that part of the kneejerk reaction that arose in that particular conversation stemmed from the fact that theory for him could take on a value that exceeded its practical use. In this instance at least, it mattered more as symbol than as a viable tool. Which isn't to suggest that his commitment to theory was somehow fetishistic or feigned, because it wasn't. Rather, in trying to contextualize his reaction within a longer historical trajectory, I'm inclined to attribute it to a brand of attachment that could overshadow rational evaluation of a concept's strengths, weaknesses, and provenance.

Part of the disagreement may have been on the essay's finer points, then, but most of it had deeper roots. There was theory and there was practice: sometimes theory lent asylum when tackling the miserable memories of practice proved too burdensome. After all, Theory had been a beacon for him in dark graduate days: it promised sunlight and oxygen when the corridor he roamed

felt irreparably choked-off. As a result, some portion of his investment in theory stemmed from a loyalty that surpassed utility alone, tinted as it was by profound gratitude and nostalgia both.

It goes without saying that without having experienced the trauma of the Dark Times for myself I can't gauge which specters assailed him most. Some sharpened his discernment; some no doubt swiped it adrift. In thinking about Hideki's trials at Berkeley, the traces of that trauma were manifested in a range of forms and places. One such site was within the fortress-like lines of his prose, which tend to read like he was steeling himself against attack. These lines bristle with intelligence yet, like a shell, renounce suppleness. Richard could wield language with a surgical precision that took not a single glyph for granted, but in the end this was a style designed not just to articulate but to protect. For he could feel insecure when it came to anticipating criticism. Sometimes this defensive stance could seem paranoid: too invested in expecting the worst. This could mean locutions slung with undue force, with the light/heat ratio skewing hot.

The author I'd read and the teacher I met were different people: one was hard, the other not so much; one dispatched cutting answers from a holster; the other lit up inquisitively when discussing *zainichi* films or his son Kai's forays into aikido and the Wii game *Kingdom Hearts*. This contradiction between private and public, between seminar and the page, underscores for me the pressures—outer and inner—that formed him. For instance, the openness that characterized much of the private conversations evaporated once an audience gathered and the podium appeared. So stark was the shift that I could only posit trauma as a factor. Because he was a terrible presenter outside of courses: at once too self-consciously wary of censure to speak freely and too proud to admit a reliance upon stony targets against which to grind his sharpest ideas.

In the end I attribute this failing more to fear than negligence. For me it seemed to stem partially from the drive to prove something to himself, if not at some level to Masao, who served as a father figure in many ways. This latter aim constituted the kind of debt that could never be repaid fully, because he owed Masao too much. Hideki was sensitive—often too sensitive—nowhere near as chic or cavalier as Miyoshi. And he cared far more about Masao's blessing than any other academic's. This could mean adopting a version of Masao's scathing style in aspiring to enact something of his cherished mentor's spirit, if not impeccable attire. Unfortunately, this meant that even when Okada's criticisms were trenchant, their shrill tone or indelicate execution could undercut their resonance. It's hard for resilient alternatives to take root when heat eclipses the light. One part of me wonders if he mightn't have gathered more allies had he not preemptively girded himself so tightly against rebuke; another part of me recognizes how rare true allies are even under ideal circumstances.

Yet for what it's worth, I can't think of an instance in which the criticisms Richard put forward were disingenuous—even when stamped by mimicry or

plagued by a dead era's residue. He never wrote a piece that didn't come from a place of genuine concern for an issue, with the big picture mattering more than minute arcana. Mere interest in a topic never sufficed. Curiosity had to be tethered to something worldly to matter, and this stayed the case even when his interests in Japanese television dramas, music, and ecology grew. In pursuits like these, he was writing to recoup time and energy he felt had been lost during graduate school. Despite Miyoshi's advice to "burn those old books," Richard maintained a commitment to Heian texts that fueled rather than forestalled his exploration of new intellectual terrain.

Accomplices of Silence

It's crucial to note that his interest in these texts had as much to do with a deep-seated love of literature as it did with a desire to renegotiate a relation to language that haunted him. On this point, I remember the encouragement he offered once when *kanbun* was wearing me down. He said that as difficult as it could be, what he always appreciated about Heian Japanese was that it was "a level playing field." He explained: No matter how good someone's modern Japanese was, regardless of whether one was a native speaker or not, with Heian texts it came down to who cared more: who was willing to sit with the dictionaries and do the work. Given the stack of homework I had at the time, the advice wasn't as uplifting as he'd meant it to be. However, the significance of his words is clearer to me now.

One foundational site to consider on this score is the Heart Mountain internment camp at which Hideki was born. Japanese was Hideki's first language and he spoke it freely with his parents until he started kindergarten. At that point, he had to lose that language. At his teachers' urging Hideki's parents were enjoined to stop speaking Japanese with him, so that he might more painlessly "succeed" in school and assimilate more ably into postwar American society. To what extent this tack was racist or well-meaning, I don't know; the two sentiments intertwine easily. What I do know from conversations with his partner, Azusa Nishimoto, is what it meant for the Okada household within the post-internment everyday: broken English, an inordinate amount of quiet as kindergarten Hideki peppered questions at parents whose love for their son translated into a policy of holding their tongues for the sake of his long-term good. No more Japanese, only scraps of English to replace it: this rent Hideki. At the same time, the anguished quiet truncated him into the mold of "Richard," as he squatted fused to the television that nullified silence, transmitting lessons in a cowboy/cartoon English his parents couldn't fathom.

They sacrificed their native language, withholding it in the hope that Hideki might have future access to a better life than theirs. The politics of language were so visceral to him and occupied the hub of his scholarly commitments due in no small part to this history. So he learned to wield architectonic prose on whose barbed edges one could snag an eyelid. This style was no less an artifact

of internment than were his love of Japanese and the wounds its childhood loss deposited within him.

The relationship of translation to domestication and even expropriation was thus a crucial problem for him, no doubt because he knew firsthand the grave consequences for citizens whose capacity to speak freely was curtailed. So the issue of learning theory, which metastasized in the Oriental Languages battle, should be understood as a fight over language: what languages were authorized to be learned and spoken, by whom, under what circumstances, and within what spaces. Theory estranged traditional relationships to language, dislodged dominant assumptions about language, even as it constituted a lexicon all its own. The idea that this new language would be quarantined from his studies of Japanese literature, that the freedom to explore new worldviews would be barred, was a grievous affront. Furthermore, that the people authorized to teach him Japanese in graduate school had been agents of the same military industrial complex that had displaced his family, confiscated not just property and dignity but effectively peeled the words from his mouth, could only have added insult to injury. Needless to say, the setting was not primed for choruses of "Kum ba ya."

But how to frame this conflict? While such a complex project requires more time and space than I have here, let me suggest in a preliminary fashion that Hideki was a subject treated and even maligned as an object, who was trying to assert his status otherwise. This led him to the harbor outside OL that was Miyoshi, and to currents of critical thought that helped him make sense of his historical condition and his potential to thrive beyond it. Hence theory as he encountered it in graduate school became a means of coming to terms with language that had been not simply lost, but stolen. It held the promise of liberating him from a draconian outlook on the world, and on Japan specifically, as rehearsed within an environment in which certain styles of critical thought were deemed contaminants to valid research. That regressive posture for him represented a microcosm of larger structural asymmetries, exploitations of authority, and the wanton abuse of power that coated curricula.

Okada's growing ecological consciousness in the last decade of his life can be understood as a move against this vector to embrace the interconnection of spaces as they kindle life or drain it. This could mean vitality at the level of deliberately unkempt lawns at his house or the successive pivots from subfield to area to the world to the planet. Each of these spaces gradually proved insufficient in some way—except possibly the last, which was the reverberant note on which he left us.

Similarly, the winding route from Hideki Okada, to Richard H. Okada, to H. Richard Okada, back to Hideki again; from internment camp, to Berkeley's Oriental Languages, to Princeton seminar room; constitutes a saga that unfolded over decades. The story of these names and places revolves around the slow labor of coming to terms with parts of himself and growing increasingly comfortable vocalizing the testimonies that accompanied them. Hideki only spoke publicly

about internment's effects near the very end of his life, and only in Japan, in large part because the prospect of doing so in the United States felt too painful. In this sense Japan and the safe classroom space shaped by his partner, Azusa, felt less vulnerable and more valuable as one in which to open up and share with Japanese students of American society his account of Heart Mountain's aftermath.

Closing Words

In closing, it feels important to note how easy it can be to neglect these narratives, because to learn of them requires stores of affinity, sincerity, and trust. All of these must be earned over the long term, through investments of time and energy in which respect is traded—sometimes smoothly, though mostly in unwieldy fits and starts. All too often these qualities shrivel in short supply. Even when they're ample, we can take them for granted until grudges burrow past what slower, candid tending can retrieve.

These histories carry material effects—like the fortress prose style—despite their propensity to disappear. I think of Miyoshi's refusal to use chopsticks in public while in the U.S. as a particular form of bodily discipline; or Okada's terror at enacting too rigid a form, lest he inadvertently reprise something of the graduate school regimen he longed to abandon. (This made for some truly abysmal public presentations that offset breathtaking seminar discussions.) Some routines are better than others, some stances more virtuous or effective than others, but we usually can't discern their merits until long after they've finally faded out.

"Reduce, Reuse, Recycle." That mantra, tacked to the otherwise vacant corkboard beside his door, now rings bittersweet. On the one hand, it reminds me of the seemingly endless spate of ideas that whirled afresh from The Table in the warmth of that cramped room. If the slogan ever took on life inside, then it did so as a generative rhythm of ideas in search of surer footing. On the other hand, the "re-" marks just how much was left unfinished, foregrounding all that withered unrevised. The prefix implies process, restless motion, iterations coiling toward some formulation nimbler than the last. Yet to hear the words' ring in retrospect reminds me of Okada's failure to develop a more sustainable style of engagement that delved outward to envelop other students and colleagues rather than rusting in a sealed office.

I'm left with handfuls of anecdotes: some sparkling reminiscences, some coarse whispers that etch the day-to-day. Reading Sakuma's words and watching his live performance altered my awareness of space and of time: the spaces we traverse and the time we have left—no moment of which is promised us. So often we do and say things we don't care about, wasting all kinds of time and energy as a result. We can read this lack of economy as a symptom of presuming long futures. What a foolish habit! How would we perform, write, or teach if we knew it would be our final song, sentence, or seminar? How might we

discuss ideas if we wanted them to be pliant but not impregnable? The journey from the seminars Hideki sat through as a student to the ones he taught as a professor suggests that one can learn to a dwell within a broad interval without coveting dominion.

Sakuma's impending death changed his perception of space. Okada's experience with constraint laid the ground for an expanded conception of space, one he enacted in his seminars and later reworked in his turn to the planet. This movement was always indebted to barbwire sites of living and thinking, but never reducible to them. Making his way from Hideki to Okada to Richard to Hideki again, he explored increasingly capacious sites in which to imagine less conclusive futures. "There are many things I want to do, things I have to do, unfinished things I've started, things/people I want to protect, things/ideas I wanted to convey. What to do about those things, I still haven't the faintest clue." Sakuma's admission rings as true for Hideki's life as it did for his own. The refrain encompasses each of us as well. Its echo draws me back to the question of how best to proceed—no answers in hand—reminding me to piece together better trajectories as time passes, do the things I want and have to do, finish what I've started, protect what matters, and convey the ideas I long to convey, before it's too late. Hideki Richard Okada was a phenomenal teacher, one who continues to impart lessons even now. My own hope is to continue to glean as much from the paths Hideki followed as from the ones he was ultimately unable or unwilling to pursue.

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Heartfelt thanks goes to Azusa Nishimoto, for sharing stories and counsel with a beautifully giving spirit. Azusa took care of Hideki in his final year to an extent that no one else on the planet did or could. She was closest to him in that last stage. She transformed his life for the better; he knew this and adored her. Lamentably, there are those who would just as soon forget or misrepresent her proximity, her loving contribution to his life, and the monumental sacrifices of time, money, and energy she made to look after him as he died. They would have her exiled and her name carved from record. Against this I want to affirm Azusa's continued strength, grace, and generosity, lest her singular human value or that of her actions be defamed or displaced.