“Globality, and Japan’s Somewhere Else”

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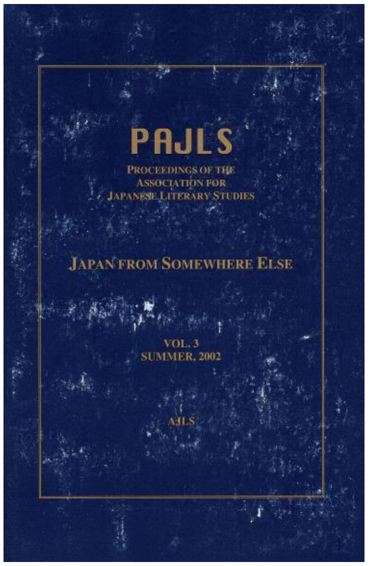
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GLOBALITY, AND JAPAN'S SOMEWHERE ELSE

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Looking at the concrete conditions of our increasingly globalized world, there does seem to be good reason to consider the view of Japan from somewhere else. Not only are far more Japanese people thinking and writing about Japan from abroad than ever, but the basic grounds of production of cultural identity are themselves transforming and expanding (think of *anime*, for example, which as eminently "Japanese" artifacts, are nonetheless global productions, and are created with technologies which themselves discourage any sense of lasting connection between production and place[1]). Diaspora, too, is an increasingly problematic term: to quote Ueno Toshiya, "it is becoming difficult to distinguish…settlement and migration, dwelling and traveling in a rigid way."[2]

These conditions newly emphasize the problem of thinking where, or what, Japan's "somewhere else" might be. At least initially, the idea of having a somewhere else also seems to imply a position of outsidedness. But especially given current conditions of the globe, one might ask, outside what? What does it now mean to stand outside of Japan?[3] These are not only historical questions, but I am interested in addressing some of the claims made about current historical conditions.

Much of what is at stake in these questions is probably clear. A very basic underlying assumption of recent depictions of a globalized Japanese identity is that the boundaries of Japaneseness no longer need to be thought of as equal to the geographical, or even political, borders of the Japanese nation. This disjuncture already would seem to imply an opening up of other categories that have fixed Japanese identity. One of the risks, therefore, of talking of a position "outside" Japan now, is a return to a view which reattaches a linguistic community to a national identity, as well as to an ethnicity, or worse, a race.

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[1] The electronic transfer of digitized information now employed by most "Japanese" *anime* production companies is being utilized to allow immediate, but transitory, cooperation between artists (and other levels of production) in different locales across the globe; all of these locales collectively become the site of production. In some ways, this technological development simply mirrors the general shift from Fordist to post-Fordist (flexible) modes of capital accumulation. On the use of technology for cooperative *anime* production, see Yamashita Atsushi, 転換期のアニメ王国日本， ｉｎ 私のお気に入りアニメ (Tokyo: Esquire Magazine, 2001), 58-64.

[2] "Urban Techno Tribes and the Japanese Recession," interview with Geert Lovink, archived on nettime at http://www.nettime.org. See also Ueno's development of this idea in "Techno-Orientalism and Media Tribalism," in *Third Text* 47, Summer 1999, 95-106.

[3] This should also be understood as a relation of the Japanese subject to, or from, itself—in a sense, in other words, a relation of interiority, not just a "somewhere else" outside of the already constituted Japanese subject.

The same can be said of the institution of Japanese literature, and the use of the Japanese language. It would seem that there are practices of Japanese literature, and uses of the Japanese language, that have expanded beyond the borders of national identity. Yet even within these practices, the risk remains that the category of Japanese literature, and even bilingual uses of language, continue to depend on (and reproduce) a sense of discrete communities of language, ethnicity, and national identity (albeit perhaps a national identity in an expanded form). It is therefore still a question whether, or how, it is possible to see Japan from somewhere else.

And, to make one last point regarding this question of the outside, at stake is not only the coherence of Japan, but also the possibilities for, and the positions, of critique. That is to say, in very simple terms, part of the process of seeing Japan from somewhere else includes the question of how to view the current conditions of Japan (and the field of Japanese studies) in critical terms, and how, or from where, one might see in these conditions something else.

I have just one brief example to illustrate the problem. In a fairly recent newspaper editorial, an eminent historian of Japan (who is himself Japanese, but living in North America) offered a critique of the latest round of nationalist and racist statements made by Governor Ishihara of Tokyo. For this historian, Governor Ishihara's nationalism is a sign of Japan's failure to join the new globalism; Ishihara shows that Japan is "moving in the opposite direction of globalisation," and because the new global order is signified above all by the "universal" values of postwar democracy, Japan, he says, "lack universality." The historian can see this, he says, because, writing from North America, he is in a position outside the conditions and context of Japan.[4]

Regardless of what one might think of the nationalism of Governor Ishihara, there are two simple points I want to draw from this example. First, for this historian, the global is clearly a universal—a world of sameness toward which everything else is moving (like modernization theory). Japan as itself "outside" this order, gains its definition as "outside" only from within the larger and transcendent order of the West as universal, and Japan therefore only reaffirms the coherence of the West as universal. The same can then be said of the critic's own position: though ostensibly himself outside of Japan, Japan serves only to reaffirm the universality of his own values of postwar democracy. More simply put, in this scheme, the global is a world without difference, and without need of translation. In fact, this is a fairly common understanding of the global.

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[4] See *Asahi Evening News*, June 28, 2000, Opinion page.

A different view of the global appears in recent revivals of the idea of cosmopolitanism. In nineteenth century uses of the term, cosmopolitanism implied an enlightened, and critical, view of the world that was specific to monied and educated classes, who had the resources to travel the world at will. These classes, and their perspective on the world, were therefore transcendent of local concerns. But the new cosmopolitanism allows on the one hand for a more universal globalization of perspective, and on the other insists that an engagement with local concerns and local differences is still possible—in other words, that positions of critique (or views of "somewhere else") are possible from within the global. There are I think good reasons to question this frame of cosmopolitanism, too,[5] though I am interested in this idea of cosmopolitanism as a global order which still allows local places of critique, or a kind of "somewhere else"—a somewhere else that is not outside of one's own order of things.

But I want to turn instead to two concrete, contemporary examples of viewing Japan from somewhere else. Each of these examples offers what might be thought of as a disposition of globality, yet each also might be thought of as implying (differing) conditions of translation—so it would seem that each contains within itself a position of "somewhere else." The first example is the bilingualism of Mizumura Minae, and the second comes from the ecstatic culture of raves, and techno music. Although these examples are in some ways apparently opposed forms, they both argue to be fundamentally performative modes of articulation. They also both claim to be possibilities derived in some ways from current world historical conditions of the globe.

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[5] While insisting on a fundamental grounding in localized interests, cosmopolitanism nonetheless still tends to be reduced to terms like glocalization (see for example, John Tomlinson, *Globalization and Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999)). Glocalization apparently derived from a Japanese agricultural term (*dochakuka*) meaning to live on one's land, and which referred to the idea of adapting generally agreed-upon agricultural techniques to suit local conditions. But this idea of the local in the end therefore really refers only to a local, particular instantiation of a single idea; again, the local only reasserts the universal, and there is no space, or moment, for difference or disjuncture.

The Mizumura work to which I refer—*Shishosetsu, Reading Left to Right*—became something of an event when it was first published in the early 1990's,[6] and has gained attention since;[7] I will speak of it only in summary terms here. The title of the book itself is some indication of Mizumura's project. The category of the *shishosetsu* (autobiographical novel) came into being along with the institution of a Japanese national literature, and itself therefore narrated a national self identity. That Mizumura is working with this form as a national self identity is further emphasized in her subtitle, which is *kindai Nihon bungaku*—the canonical term for the institution of modern "Japanese" literature. So clearly, she is invoking a received institutional means by which the development of the individual subject is merged with the production of the national subject.

Nonetheless, "from left to right" also announces a technology of reading different from the classic historical image, and material practice, of Japanese literature. The book itself, furthermore, is written partly in Japanese and partly—randomly—in English. (This raises the question, how might one translate it? If into English, does one simply reverse things, translating the Japanese text into English and the English text into Japanese? But more on that shortly.)

The narrative, generally, concerns Mizumura finding her own identity as Japanese, but from within the institutions and language of the U.S. (having been brought to the United States when her father was transferred there, Mizumura began very early on to feel that she would not be accepted as a legitimate English speaker, and so proceeded to learn Japanese "like a native"). The book begins with an apocalyptic context reminiscent more of Japanese *anime* than the panoramic establishing shots of a typical *shishosetsu* novel. The opening scene is uncertain, an exilic condition of "exodus," pierced by the immediacy of a wailing siren. The narrator is unsure whether what she is describing is a death, an automobile accident, or simply a severe snowstorm (she wavers, alternating between certainty that a murder has happened, then resolving that it is all just a snowstorm, then thinking no, it must be an accident). The sound of the siren furthermore constructs an ambiguous connection to the narrator's own past, blurring the distinction between firm memory and immediate illusion. This failure of clear boundaries of definition is reinforced by a non-linguistic image, a black and white photograph of, apparently, snowflakes; this too though is unclear.[8] So, in all of this, Mizumura seems to be refusing both a transcendent narrator position that, as an external perspective, might unite and clarify a larger singular identity, and she also refuses a sure point of origin that might anchor a single, coherent identity.

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[6] 私小説 *from left to Right* was published in serial form in the journal 批評　空間, between 1992 and 1994.

[7] See for example, Komori Yoichi's ＜ゆらぎ＞の日本文学, Tokyo: NHK Books, 1998.

At the same time, she seems to reject hybridity, at least of the sort that is a simple and reunified mix. The story is about her emergence out of these conditions *as Japanese*—not as a Japanese-American. Being Japanese therefore contains within itself the differences of Japanese and English, and even, to some extent, the experiences of Japanese and American culture. The book itself, with its left-to-right structure and its incorporation of English, is a model of this Japanese form.

In general, the book tries to articulate a critique of the kinds of identities, and modes of narrating identity, that have become institutionalized as canonical Japanese form. Especially at the outset, it seems to neither assume a coherent linguistic or national community of readers, nor does it produce one. To the extent that this is the case, the book does not symmetrically pair a Japan with an outside from which one might critique Japan. But Japan is nonetheless produced as other from where it had been. Or at least, this seems to be the idea.

Similarly, in published comments about her book, Mizumura says that the mixed use of Japanese and English is meant to create conditions literally requiring translation.[9] This is not a neutral bilingualism, or combination of two equal but discrete languages: as Mizumura says, the book could be translated into any language *except* English—English, in other words, must remain the one universal language, hierarchically privileged because it is the one language that could be interspersed within any other language in the world and still likely be understood. For English speakers, there is no equivalent.

Therefore, for Mizumura translation is not about the production of neutral equivalence, or even simple difference, between two languages identities. Instead, translation has to include, first, a revelation of the hierarchical relations that inevitably exist between languages, and second, therefore a disclosure of the ways in which one language is politically implicated within another (though she is less clear about that). At very least, translation involves a revelation of the asymmetry of existing relations between linguistic identities. In this process of revelation, there is also then the possibility of a destabilization of the easy oppositions whereby distinct languages and cultures (Japanese and English) conspire to define one another as, each, distinct against the other.

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[8] One possible way of reading this image would be to understand it as invoking the trope of spores. Somewhat akin to Deleuze and Guattari's concept of the rhizome, the spore as a form of identity is unrooted, and, as a collectivity, without clear or stable boundaries. The spore therefore is in contradistinction to arboreal forms of identity (which are firmly rooted in a permanent locale, and which may literally branch off, but these branches remain tied to the rooted locale). Mizumura includes other photographs in the book which in fact do generally highlight trees, but there is little to specify these particular readings into the photographs themselves.

The blurred photo, I might note, also reappears at the end of the book, as if the only possible bounds of the book itself could be this image of sporadic uncertainty.

[9] See Mizumura Minae, "Authoring Shishōsetsu from left to right," in Eiji Sekine, ed., *PMAJLS* vol. 4, Summer 1998, Michigan: University of Michigan, 422-432.

One might extend Mizumura's argument, and say that it is only within this context of hierarchy, and of implication of one linguistic community within another, that identity—including that of being "Japanese"—can emerge.[10] This is not therefore a locality or a site of difference that occupies a position of externality, against which one might define a permanent global or universal identity. This I think would be a productive understanding of what Mizumura means by bilingualism, and how translation for her is a means of revealing the generalized conditions, not only of difference between two languages or cultures, but also for how this difference can constructively open up an apparently fixed category of identity, such as Japaneseness, from within.

For Mizumura, the closure of Japaneseness within "modern Japanese literature" (*kindai Nihon bungaku*) is really a post World War II phenomenon. Komori Yoichi, writing on Mizumura's book, argues the same point in some detail.[11] For Komori, the very fact of the inclusion of Korean, Taiwanese, and Manchurian peoples in Japan's prewar empire did not allow for a direct equation between the boundaries of the Japanese language and the limits of Japaneseness. It was (ironically) only with Japan's defeat that the configuration of Japanese language, Japanese culture, Japanese people, and Japanese identity as coterminous—as a single construct—could arise. For both Komori and Mizumura, therefore, even just the inclusion of English within a "Japanese" text already breaks up these coterminous relations of "Japan."

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[10] Mizumura herself at times appears to be making this argument, and describes the asymmetry as one between a local (Japanese) and a universal (English). However, in what is admittedly only a short article, she risks reducing the relations between the two as a relation between two pre-constituted differences—Japanese language and culture do not therefore emerge within English, nor is English therefore a part of being Japanese, but each is instead again opposed to the other as distinct identities, albeit in an asymmetrical way.

[11] Komori, ＜ゆらぎ＞の日本文学, 283.

Thus, Mizumura argues not only for a bilingualism that reveals asymmetries, but also more simply for the use of what she describes as the materiality of language. This materiality, as Mizumura puts it, can guarantee the "untranslatability" of language.[12] By this she means not loss of meaning, but rather the breakup of any easy transparency between the boundaries of a single language, a single people, and a single culture. And because she sees this untranslatability as inherent in the origins of the institution of "modern Japanese literature," her return to the use of that term seems to be a call for the retention of that sense of untranslatability, again *within* the narrativization of Japanese identity. In this way as well, one might follow Komori and see in Mizumura's book a project that, in its use of both Japanese and English, shows the Japanese subject to be made up of multiple linguistic authorities;[13] this would open up both the subject of Japan as figured in postwar "modern Japanese literature," and the relations of self and other that have helped to unify this postwar Japanese subject. This would then be a somewhere else to those coterminous Japanese boundaries of language, culture, and identity.

As an artifact of and a figure for contemporary conditions, Mizumura's book in all of these ways would seem to effect a radicalization of the institution of Japanese national literature, and the kind of subject that implies.

This is, however, I think a fairly generous reading of the book. Any quick glance at Japanese publications will show that in many ways, surely Mizumura is right about the implication of English within Japanese, including in the most material ways; her book certainly puts that into practice. But as a performative articulation of the emergence of a different kind of Japanese identity, her novel is less convincing. Even the narrative itself progresses in an almost reactionary repetition of the original *shishosetsu* form. From the initial apocalyptic moment, the story emerges into a redemptive resolution of clarity and wholeness, in which Mizumura finally decides she *is* Japanese and so will return to Japan (and with this realization, she throws open the window to light and fresh air). Instead of being an autobiography that opened up the history of a Japanese self-identity to something else, in the end it returns to being a history of that self. Language, and perhaps ethnicity, are returned to the nation, even if from out of the space of a globalized world.

At best, the book reads more simply as a Japanese book with clever usages of English—a kind of internationalism only, in which Mizumura is herself for a time an almost typically Japanese-American (a hybrid at most, and in-between perhaps, but still playing within a space of national linguistic identities), who then reverts to being an almost typically cosmopolitan Japanese (able to speak, or at least read, English with some ease—but this does little to shift the confluence of Japanese language, culture, and nation as definitive of Japanese identity). Even her use of the spore-like photographs of snow, which could be explored as a complicated and varied figure of identity and experience, and the apocalyptic non-origin at the start of her narrative, exist simply as fixed, unidimensional forms of identity that in the end specularly oppose, and reaffirm, the coherent identity of Mizumura as Japanese. The materiality of the photograph no more breaks up the coherence of the written words than the opening uncertainty breaks up the coherence of a linear narrative, or than the peppering of the Japanese text with English words does anything much to the overall grammatical or syntactic structure of the Japanese.

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[12] Mizumura, "Authoring Shishōsetsu," 429.

[13] Komori, ibid, 313.

Lastly, for me, Mizumura's vision of bilingualism, and her optimism for a built-in mode of translation that will creatively produce for the reader a new understanding of Japan's own implication within, and asymmetrical relationship to, American English, simply was not available from reading her book. The asymmetry reveals itself only at a moment or relation outside the text itself, as for instance in the relations that develop between the text as written and other versions of the text that might be written in translation, in other languages—or for example, in Mizumura's own writings about the text. In effect, Mizumura's relationship to her own practice, or her position vis à vis her own practice, is itself external—just as the "somewhere else" that she would like to have present within her text (through the incorporation of English, etc.) really only emerges outside of the text, and just as America and American English end up as something she may refer to, but nevertheless something against which she can continue to define herself as "Japanese." In other words Mizumura ends in a position of transcendent externality not only as a narrator, but as what Naoki Sakai calls an epistemic observer (a subject formation which exists in a distanced, detached position of universal objectivity, and which guarantees the objective consistency of that which is observed, but only from this position of detachment from any practical relationship).[14] In all of these ways, the requirement for some kind of external position contradicts the claims for a material incorporation of linguistic difference, which will reveal the asymmetries and therefore inconsistencies of a supposedly coherent

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[14] See Naoki Sakai, *Translation and Subjectivity* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), chapter 4.

Japanese language/culture/nation aggregate (defined through symmetrical opposition to aggregates such as American English). If this is bilingualism—and I am not fully convinced that it is—then it is not an effective model for finding a "somewhere else" from within the current identity of the Japanese subject.

I want therefore to turn briefly to another, but different, argument for a kind of globalism that nonetheless articulates new, different possibilities of locality and difference. This centers on the culture of raves, and techno music (it is also tied to electronic and digital technologies, but I will not address that here). For this I am drawing from a published conversation Michel Gaillot held with Jean-Luc Nancy and Michel Maffesoli,[15] as well as from Ueno Toshiya's discussions on raves in Japan.

Some of these claims are problematic in fairly obvious ways, and I will just briefly summarize some of the principal ideas.

First of all Gaillot says that raves, and techno music generally, began without commitment to any particular ideology; they are not political in that way. Instead, raves as ecstatic events are about the refusal of what Gaillot calls "one-way meaning" (*sens-unique*; a term that both implies having only one meaning, and refers to a one-way street).[16] They are about the refusal of any kind of fixed meaning that would allow for the grounding of ideologies. So too the obsessive repetition in techno music, or, for Nancy, the simple idea and genre of "noise" implies forms which have "neither soundness nor sense."[17]

This sense of being beyond singular meaning works literally through the body, in the trance-like all-night dancing of the rave, and Gaillot believes this results in a new mode of being-in-the-body and being in the world. It is also supposedly capable of creating a new sense of community, and a new mode of communal being. (This communal being is reinforced by the use of ecstasy, a drug designed both to encourage a generalized sense of happy, loving, even transcendent joy, and to literally enhance the physical act of love.) This community is itself, however, based not on any preset meaning or identity, and continues as a globalized form only on the basis of electiveness rather than rootedness.

For Ueno Toshiya, this is also a matter of standing outside the value structures of capital. At least early on, raves were relatively spontaneous dances held in spaces outside the normal paid venues, and beyond the control of the large culture industries. In the raves themselves, too, participants prefer to barter goods rather than sell for profit, and so on. As for Michel Gaillot, for Ueno rave culture produces a kind of community which is not tied to rooted forms of place or identity—and certainly not to any national border. The subcultural "tribes" of rave music (for example, Goa dance/music) create a sort of local identity, which one can freely choose, and while these local identities have no ties to national or other fixed boundaries, they nonetheless are also global—you can find Goa dance/music in Tokyo and in Montreal, as elsewhere.

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[15] Michel Gaillot, *Multiple Meaning Techno: An Artistic and Political Laboratory of the Present* (Paris: Editions Dis Voir, 1998).
[16] Gaillot, 18-19.
[17] Ibid, 22.

Thus by these arguments, in the same way that rave culture supposedly entails non-singular meaning, it also creates a non-rooted sense of place, or, in a sense, a community of non-places. Gaillot thus says rave culture "interrupts the West as a search and demand for meaning."[18]

As an ecstatic moment, the rave also creates a disjunction in time. Raves, says Gaillot, do not project a future utopia, nor reenact an ideal past, and instead "recognize truth only in the present."

The rave is thus an immediate experience of, or encounter with, difference. There is no distancing or delay, or position of detachment such as that implied by the epistemic observations of, for example, Mizumura. One simply feels and experiences, rather than contemplates and describes, this moment out of time and place. Accordingly, by these terms, the rave participant cannot exist in a specular relationship of selfhood, or of selfhood and difference.

I am not sure if such a participatory position is really possible at all, but in any event, it should be fairly obvious that in this case, all this might just as easily risk, simply, *in*difference. The drug-enhanced ecstasy of the rave dancer, the refusal of firm, singular meanings and of rooted localities—all this might be taken as an argument for the *transcendence* of difference, and for *detachment* from the world rather than engagement. In effect, this may return us to precisely the kind of detachment from local conditions that one sees in the early British cosmopolitanites (if not also the imperialist privilege of enjoying the transcendence of boundaries that describes the older form of cosmopolitanism). Ironically, to the extent that it is a position of utter indifference, this example too returns us to a global disposition like that of the historian mentioned at the outset of this talk, not only because of the detachment, but because it is a world ultimately without need or possibility of translation. More simply put, in contrast to Mizumura's eventual return to the clear borders of Japan, from this view one begins to lose sight of Japan almost entirely. The attitude of the rave also makes it hard to conceive of how, or where, one might find a position of reflective, communal critique toward Japan, or anywhere else.

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[18] Ibid, 27.

The two examples I have raised here—Mizumura's bilingual critique and Michel Gaillot's ecstatic transcendence—are in some ways opposed. Mizumura's relation to her own Japaneseness, including to the possibility of being already "somewhere else" from a national identity, turns out to be reflective. And this reflective relation to her own Japanese identity is itself, in the end, *her* position of "viewing Japan from somewhere else." But it is one that, as I have tried to show, reasserts the coherence and equivalence of precisely the boundaries of Japaneseness that at the outset she wants to show are in question.

On the other hand, the argument for the trance-like attitude of rave culture, which can be experienced in similar ways pretty much anywhere in the world at all, implies a non-reflective immediacy. It is indeed a transcendent "somewhere else" that arises from within. But in this case, a practitioner like Ueno Toshiya risks losing the retention of *any* relation to received identities and boundaries of Japaneseness—that is *his* position of somewhere else.[19]

I should point out that the tension between these two possibilities is now also evident as a disciplinary question, within the field of Asian studies. There is a pull for those of us in Asian studies between having a clear sense of difference between inside versus outside (that is, inside versus outside Asia) on the one hand, and having transcended that line on the other, and between utilizing Asia, as a place that is outside the West, for reflection on the one hand, and on the other hand dispensing with that framework of using the identity of one area to reflect against the other altogether.

This opposition of views, as to what might constitute a "somewhere else" to Japan, thus continues to define the field of the global. Insofar as this is the case, it is perhaps still worth juxtaposing these opposed views as a means precisely of bringing into view the contradictions and possibilities of our time.

This is not therefore simply a pessimistic reading of the supposed possibilities held out by changing conditions of globalization. Nor should the examples from Mizumura Minae and Michel Gaillot (or Ueno Toshiya) be thought of as simply opposed. Both Mizumura's reflective position vis a vis Japan, and Ueno's practical immediacy, together remain productive—

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[19] Ueno Toshiya's discussion of rave culture, as in "Techno-Orientalism and Media Tribalism," is far more nuanced than Gaillot's, and cognizant of the risks of these claims.

even while each also returns to the confinements of the modern national subject of Japan.

Ueno's vision of a global rave culture does show the possibility of a type of community—including a "Japanese" community—which is truly open, provisional, and clearly something other than the neat overlapping of language, ethnos, and nation that has defined Japan in the twentieth century. And this does fit current global conditions in some ways.

But Mizumura's more reflective relation to Japan can be revealing not only of the ongoing, real production of national borders and East : West divides, but it also encourages awareness of the new hierarchies and hegemonies which continue to arise within globalization, and which Ueno's rave position claims to transcend.

In sum, both examples raise the specter of seeing new grounds for a different kind of Japan, but both also produce a return to older, received forms. And so rather than look at either for a definitive understanding of Japan today, it is perhaps only in the tension between them—between a return to the national and the emergence of something else, and between positions of reflective critique and practical transcendence—that one can for the moment see the possibilities of Japan as somewhere else.

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