

# Translating Embodiedness symposium, 13th March 2023, The Place, London

## Speakers' abstracts

### Michael Bourdaghs

'Literature as Worlding: Reorientation in Natsume Sōseki and Hotta Yoshie'

Adapting Sara Ahmed's refraction of the work of Merleau-Ponty and others, this paper traces how two important twentieth century-novelists, Natsume Sōseki (1867-1916) and Hotta Yoshie (1918-1998), sought to redefine literature as a practice of worlding, as a process of disorientation and reorientation. Each saw literature as a domain for writing an affective history of the present, one that involved both literal and figurative travel into new and disorienting domains that required a subject to reorient themselves through a process of worlding. For Sōseki, travel to London in 1900-1902 produced a massive sense of dislocation that was accompanied by a collapse of conceptual certainty about literature itself. His subsequent attempt to reorient himself vis-à-vis literature and the world took place through a shift into the domain of science. Half a century later, Hotta Yoshie would travel to Delhi and encounter a similar sense of disorientation that likewise required a radical rethinking of the category of literature and of the world, particularly the Third World of Cold War geopolitics—a rethinking that took place in part via a dialogue with Sōseki's earlier writings.

### Franz Prichard

'Pedagogies in Plentitude: Anticolonial and Ecological Embodiments in the work of Nakahira Takuma and Ishimure Michiko'

This paper traces the development of my ongoing research into the expressions of anticolonial and ecological perspectives in contemporary Japanese literary and visual media cultures that emerged in the wake of the macro-political upheavals of the global 1960s. I will discuss the prospects for multi-sensorial approaches (based on visual, aural, other forms of embodiment) to the entangled forms of materiality and ecology that writers, critics, and artists developed to reforge relational modalities of creative praxis. Here, I introduce two examples of acutely heightened sensitivities to the entanglements of material-ecological relations found in Nakahira Takuma's essays on the limits of photographic expression in *Kettō shashin-ron* ("Dual on Photography," with Shinoyama Kishin, 1977), and in Ishimure Michiko's literary reclamation of multi-layered human and more-than-human lifeworlds in *Tsubaki no umi no ki* (*Story of the Sea of Camellias*, 1976) in the wake of the Minamata disaster. I also reflect on the generative insights that these and other contemporary literary and visual media practices have for developing anticolonial and ecological outlooks through our collective scholarly work of thinking, studying, and teaching with/in a moment of profound change.

### William Schaefer

'An "Organism of Colours": Kawauchi Rinko and the Ecologies of Colour Photography'

In recent decades photographers in China, Japan, and the West have reconceived the medium of photography as not primarily representational, but rather as ecological—a crucial site for staging fundamental questions of the relations between culture and nature provoked in a time of climate

crisis. This presentation explores colour photography and the ways in which “following colors in their materiality,” as Jeffrey Jerome Cohen puts it, is an “entry into [the] messy intricacy” of ecologies. I focus on Kawauchi Rinko’s photographs in *Illuminance*, *Ametsuchi*, and *M/E On this sphere Endlessly interlinking*, and how they register ephemeral moments in which light and colour shape and emerge from interrelationships among embodied perceivers, animals, plants, objects, ecosystems, landscapes, and the materiality of photography itself. I situate Kawauchi’s work in relation to that of two other photographers. Terri Weifenbach’s saturated, blurred, and shallow-focus photographs in *Cloud Physics* depict entanglements of plant forms, atmospheric particles and the instruments that measure them, and perception. In Ron Jude’s photographs in *12 Hz*, the threshold of human perception of geological and organic forces and forms is registered by an absence of colour.

Taken together these photographers’ work explores three intertwining strands: ecological conceptions of the embodied mind and its perception of colour; nature’s own colour palettes and the optical qualities of plants and atmospheres; and the ecological entanglements of the materiality of colour photography. What does it mean for a photographer engaging with the present moment of climate crisis to be immersed in a world that, as philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty remarked, is “an organism of colours”?

### **Paul Roquet**

‘Selective Embodiment in the Retreat to the Metaverse’

This presentation continues my investigation into the social politics of selective embodiment in virtual environments, where the aspects of the lived body that get left behind are just as important as what gets rebuilt within computational space. In this talk I focus on the interest surrounding the ‘metaverse’ in Japan that quickly emerged following Facebook’s rebranding to Meta in October 2021: a vision of a more embodied next-generation internet where ever-larger amounts of everyday life could take place within virtual space. Focusing on trade paperbacks from VR developers and academics in Japan aiming to explain the social implications of the metaverse to the general public, I focus on the strong emphasis on physical and perceptual withdrawal that characterizes Japanese metaverse approaches. Examining the conservative ‘otaku’ politics that underwrites this retreat to a more comfortable, more controllable space, I offer a critical examination of these proposals to outsource the space of everyday social interaction to for-profit immersive technology platforms.

### **Rosa van Hensbergen**

‘Imitating Victor’s Dog’

This talk is about the lives and afterlives of found props. My starting point is the 1964 durational “combine”, *Gold Standard*, performed by Robert Rauschenberg in Tokyo to a live soundtrack: a series of questions in Japanese delivered by art critic Tōno Yoshiaki. Rauschenberg was joined unexpectedly onstage by several Japanese artists, Shinohara Ushio and Kojima Nobuaki, carrying their own artworks: a papier-mâché Marcel Duchamp, a figure sporting a ‘QUESTION’ sign, and imitations of another Rauschenberg combine, *Coca-Cola Plan* (1958). But he was also joined onstage by a more docile companion: the ever-attentive Victor’s dog. Gracing the doorways of HMV stores across the country, this porcelain mascot found his way from the streets into the hands of artists repeatedly in the 1960s-70s: appearing at Shinohara’s 1964 neo-Dada exhibition; onstage in Hijikata Tatsumi’s 1965 performance, *Rose-Coloured Dance (Barairo dansu)*; and onscreen in Terayama Shūji’s 1970/71 film *Emperor Tomato Ketchup (Tomato kechappu kōtei)*. Moving between sets and

settings, stages, galleries, and screens, the returning presence of Victor's dog asks how we experience the singularity of reproduced and reproducible objects, constellating contemporaneous discourses around our relationships with objects (or *objets*) and the possibilities of "imitation art".

### **Fusako Innami**

'Language Passing through the Body: Movement, Writing, and Improvisation'

This paper examines a phenomenological moment in postwar Japan in the 1970s, with a focus on dancer Atsugi Bonjin's engagement with phenomenological ideas on one hand and his distrust in language on the other. Atsugi, whose work was often regarded as derivative of Western modern dance and who kept his distance from the rising *butoh* dance, employed the repetition of gestures in his works and engaged in consistent physical training. Through these elements, feelings and affects (*jokan*) emerge through individual bodies, and this method incorporates a conjoined flow of bodily movement, sound cues, and audience responses emerging in space. Paying attention to phenomenological accounts by contemporaneous dance critics, such as Ichikawa Miyabi and Miura Masashi, and to Merleau-Ponty's thought with which Atsugi engaged, this paper explores movements and affects arising through bodily interaction with the theatrical environment.

### **Pedro Erber**

'Art, Embodied Perception, and Deintellectualization'

From around the late 1950s, phenomenology provided a theoretical basis for the work of artists in various parts of the world, who emphasized the importance of materiality, the body, movement, and sensorial perception. Running counter to the much bespoken "dematerialization of the art object" (Lippard and Chandler), which defined New York-based conceptual art since the late 1960s, and often in explicit opposition to it, artists as diverse as the Korean-Japanese Lee Ufan and the Brazilian Hélio Oiticica enlisted the work of French philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty, among others, to create art that emphasized the importance of embodied, phenomenological perception. I propose to take the work and writings of Lee and Oiticica as a starting point to explore the implications of this search for a phenomenological art in the late twentieth century and its conflicting relationship with conceptualism.