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Real Kyoto | Aichi Triennale

"Aichi Triennale 2019 Talk: HO Tzu Nyen (AT2019 artist) × ASADA Akira (Critic) On Hotel Aporia"

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ARTICLE, TALK & INTERVIEW



The day before the ending of the Aichi Triennale 2019, in the middle of the controversy, a public talk between a participating artist and a critic was held in Toyota City, one of the main locations of the event. The theme of the talk was the artist's new installation work on the modern and contemporary history of Japan. Kamikaze pilots, Kyoto School philosophers, Yasujiro Ozu and Ryuichi Yokoyama — how did the artist conceive and create the work that involved these diverse elements? How does that work respond to the contemporary reality? This is a virtually word-for-word transcription and translation of the thrilling talk.

The work *Hotel Aporia* is installed in Kiraku-Tei (joyful, pleasure, house), which used to be a Japanese inn and restaurant built in the Taisho era (1912-1926). Four inter-connected video installations with six screens adding up to a total duration of 84 minutes are presented across four rooms in the house. The images feature a selection of re-purposed Japanese films and an animation, with all of the faces of protagonists erased. Intercut with archival materials, the work is structured as a series of epistolary exchanges about the various protagonists or inhabitants of Hotel Aporia, read out in multiple voices. In one of the rooms, a giant industrial fan lies behind the screen, spinning into action every five minutes. The sound of the wind and low frequencies pass through all the four rooms, as their Shoji doors vibrate in synchronicity.

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Photos by Hiroshi Tanigawa
By courtesy of the Aichi Triennale 2019

Asada: To begin with, I would like to make a brief comment on the Aichi Triennale as a whole. As we were hit by the powerful Typhoon Hagibis yesterday, the Aichi Triennale was hit by the "media typhoon" about the "After 'Freedom of Expression?'" exhibition. The storm was created by the Internet neo-nationalists and had spread to the mass media. That was very unfortunate, but today, the day before its ending, I think it can be said that the triennial has successfully survived the aggressive storm, having restarted "After 'Freedom of Expression?'" albeit in a limited form. I highly respect the swift and steady efforts of Hideaki Omura, chairman of the executive committee of the triennial and governor of Aichi Prefecture; Daisuke Tsuda, artistic director; a number of curators and staff members; and most of all, the artists, especially the artists who voluntarily formed the group "ReFreedom_Aichi" to develop their actions (there were also internal contradictions, but that must have been healthier than having none). As a result, this edition of the triennial was much more meaningful than a superficial success. The issues have not been solved yet, and the struggle will continue, but I would like to make sure here that this edition of the triennial has a historical meaning in that sense. That was my personal impression, and I would like to start the talk with Ho Tzu Nyen now.

Yasujiro Ozu and Ryuichi Yokoyama

Asada: Ho Tzu Nyen transformed the whole architecture of the Kiraku-Tei in Toyota City into the meticulous work titled *Hotel Aporia*. The title sounds like a Japanese version of "Grand Hotel Abgrund (Abyss)," the term that Lukács used when he criticized Adorno. Lukács was a literature critic who had a very subtle sensibility, but as a Marxist, he accepted the official Stalinist ideology of post-war East Germany as a materialization of Marxism. In contrast, the Frankfurt School including Horkheimer and Adorno said no to both the capitalism and Stalinist realizations of socialism. They said neither, they said nor, accumulating denials toward the abyss. Such negative dialectics appeared to be very radical, but Lukács asked, "Mr. Adorno, aren't you just staying comfortably in the grand hotel called 'the abyss?'" By the way, it is said that Horkheimer used to stay at a hotel called Lutetia whenever he visited Paris. I used the hotel when meeting Jacques Derrida in Paris without knowing that. Perhaps Hotel Lutetia was the origin of the idea of "Grand Hotel Abgrund." Anyway, the Frankfurt School ventured into negative dialectics when they found simple, positive dialectics toward affirmation through denial or toward revolution through class struggle not relevant anymore, and Lukács said to them, "You are just elegantly arguing in the 'Grand Hotel Abgrund'." Bearing this anecdote in mind, I think it is very witty and interesting to revisit the issue of the Kyoto School philosophers including Kitaro Nishida and Hajime Tanabe and their war cooperation in the fictional *Hotel Aporia* instead of the Grand Hotel Abgrund. So, I would like to start by asking you how you conceived this — how you spun the thread of association from the hotel Kiraku-Tei to the story of the Kamikaze pilots, and then to the Kyoto School philosophy, and then to the films of Yasujiro Ozu and cartoons of Ryuichi Yokoyama.

Ho: Hello. Thank you everyone for being here. It's always difficult to speak about the beginning of a project, to find the point of origin, where everything begins, without falsifying it or making a myth, but I'll try.

If I have to choose one possible point of beginning, it is probably when the curator Yoko Nose-san invited me to do a project at the Kiraku-Tei. Her earliest invitation was that she wanted me to create in this building, something about "old and new Asia." That was the beginning. I was curious about the building and began to ask Nose-san for more information about it. When she started to research into the existing archives related to the building, she came across an interview with the former landlady of the Kiraku-Tei, who recalled the last formal dinner of the Kusanagi Unit, a Kamikaze squadron, before they flew off on their mission. She also mentioned that their families came to the Kiraku-Tei after the war and started drinking and singing a song to remember their children.

This episode buried itself very deeply in me. I think, at that time, I still wasn't exactly sure what the project was going to be about. I had begun researching on the Kyoto School quite a while before, and somehow my research on the Kyoto School came together with this episode of the Kamikaze.

I guess I should also speak about the other protagonist in the work: Yasujiro Ozu. It must have been about 18 years ago that I was watching all of Ozu's films. A particular type of scene recurs in some of these films — the male protagonist gets drunk with a former comrade-in-arms and a war-time song breaks out. I remember getting very excited that one of these songs referred to Singapore. Later I found out that Ozu was in Singapore between 1942 and 1945. So, since maybe 10 or 15 years ago, I always wanted to find out more about Ozu's time in Singapore: what he did, and how he spent his time there.

I think this wove itself together into the episode of the Kamikaze squadron and my ongoing interest in the Kyoto School. I began imagining the Kiraku-Tei in its original function as a Ryokan [hotel] with a number of protagonists populating its different rooms, and the only thing linking them would be that they lived through a particularly complex period in Japanese history.



Installation view at Aichi Triennale 2019
HO Tzu Nyen, *Hotel Aporia*, 2019
Photo: Hiroshi Tanigawa

Asada: Ryuichi Yokoyama's cartoon is also there. Of course, he was not the only cartoonist whose works ideologically aroused children's enthusiasm for the war at that time. Various cartoons such as Suiho Tagawa's *Norakuro* or Keizo Shimada's *Boken Dankichi* did that. And Ryuichi Yokoyama, as one of these cartoonists, is invited to one of the rooms of *Hotel Aporia*. That also constitutes the "Grand Hotel" form of the work. In cinema, the term means that there are various people who are occupied with various concerns in various rooms, and they share some kind of destiny. For example, the hotel catches fire. While there is the filmmaker Yasujiro Ozu among the guests, *Hotel Aporia* as a whole appeared to be a Japanese version of "Grand Hotel Abgrund" and at the same time a Grand Hotel film.

Ho: I began finding out about Ryuichi Yokoyama when we were researching about propaganda units that were sent to Singapore and Southeast Asia. Yokoyama makes for an interesting contrast with Ozu. While Yokoyama made the propaganda film *Fuku-chan's Submarine*, it seems that Ozu, who was sent to Singapore to make a movie about the radical Indian nationalist Subhas Chandra Bose, never did it. I read that he burnt the script before the British returned to Singapore. Ozu never, to my knowledge, ever spoke openly about his time in Singapore.

Asada: He didn't work on the task he was given and saw a lot of American movies that he couldn't see in Japan there.

Ho: Yes. In Singapore, it is recorded that Ozu drank a lot, swam a lot, played a lot of tennis, and watched American films that were confiscated by the Japanese military. He saw movies like *Gone with the Wind*, and *Citizen Kane*, which he found to be a masterpiece. So I think he had generally a good time during the war.

I think it's quite different with Yokoyama. There was one interview that took place after his museum in Kochi opened, and I think that the interviewer (Tomio Sakuramoto) took him by surprise. I don't think Yokoyama wanted to be interviewed by him. The interviewer asked Yokoyama how he felt about his participation in the war. For Yokoyama, there was no regret. He said that he would do it again if he was ever called upon by the state. I see Ozu and Yokoyama as examples not only of different choices but also very different strategies of life. For me, this pair made for a very interesting comparison.



Installation view at Aichi Triennale 2019
HO Tzu Nyen, *Hotel Aporia*, 2019
Photo: Hiroshi Tanigawa

The Problems of the Kyoto School

Asada: Since some of the audience might not know very much about the Kyoto School philosophers that are featured in this work, I would like to point out two very basic, major problems in them. One is that, especially in Kitaro Nishida, they are much more rhetorical than logical. The other is that they are generally very schematic.

About the former, it is helpful to compare Nishida with Daisetsu Suzuki. They belonged to the same generation and were friends. Suzuki articulated the ideas of Zen and Buddhism in English and influenced modernists including John Cage and abstract expressionists because his writings were quite logical and easy to understand. However, Nishida was more serious-minded in that he tried to translate what was supposed to be intuitively understood through disciplines such as Zen into words, so he had to accumulate very unnatural rhetoric, which is why it is very difficult to logically understand his writings. Probably Tanabe is more logical than Nishida, though.

The latter applies to most of the Kyoto School scholars. They tend to develop arguments in a very schematic West-versus-East structure. For example, they argue that while holism and atomism or totalitarianism and individualism are opposed in Western philosophy, Eastern philosophy puts importance on the "network of relationships" that is neither the whole nor elements. They claim that the Eastern relationalism is capable of overcoming the Western dualism. As the Japanese word "human" consists of two letters meaning "person" and "between," a human being is neither an element of the whole nor an isolated subject but a traffic node of relationships. Totalitarianism and individualism are opposed in the West, the Stalinist communism and the fascism of Mussolini and Hitler are opposed within the totalitarianism, and the Anglo-Saxon liberal capitalism is opposed to both of them. They argue that relationalism or the "cooperativism" that Kiyoshi Miki, the Marxist left of the Kyoto School, advocated can overcome these oppositions. In short, what they advocated as the overcoming of Western modernity was that Eastern wisdom would get over all the oppositions in Western dualism. However, that was an overcoming within a schematic language-game, and it was unclear what relationalism actually was and what kind of system this cooperativism was.

By the way, Nishida said something like that as well in his lecture titled "The Problem of Japanese Culture" that started at Kyoto University in 1938 and in the Koshō Hajime [first lecture] ceremony in front of the Emperor in early 1941, before the attack on Pearl Harbor, using biological metaphors. He said something like, "As Your Majesty knows very well as a biologist, a forest is neither a united whole nor the sum of isolated pieces of plants and animals. It is an ecological network of relationships," which meant that society was supposed to be like that. Japan should not imperialistically dominate Asia as a whole just replacing the West but should build the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere as a transnational and ecological network. Japan should take on the leadership in the process but should not become a new hegemon to replace the Western colonialism and imperialism. The arguments of the Kyoto School are more or less like that, which sounds agreeable but was obviously an ideology that beautified the Japanese colonialism and imperialism. There are some people who argue that the Kyoto School was close to the navy and tried to defend the minimum necessity of liberalism in opposition to the explicit totalitarianism and imperialism of the army. That makes some sense, but eventually the navy was equally bad as the army, and the Kyoto School was too.

I would like to add that what Nishida said about experience in Zen sounds very much like what Eastern martial arts practitioners often say. In the West, a conflict occurs between virile subjects armored with muscle and iron, and that produces a result. That is the Western dialectics. The East is different: you are an existence that is as flexible as water and capable of letting your opponent fall down just by altering the direction of his energy. As Nishida liked to say, you "empty yourself to embrace the other." It's like Bruce Lee, and it might be interesting that the Hong Kong pro-democracy activists employed his words, "Be formless, shapeless, like water" as their slogan. However, Nishida connected that to the Emperor system in *The Problem of Japanese Culture*. In the West, there is God who says, "I am that I am," and there is the absolute monarch who says, "L'état, c'est moi," which has taken the form, for example, of the presidential system in the modern world, and states that employ that kind of system aim for top-down, colonialist and imperialist domination of the world. However, the East is different. The Japanese Emperor never says, "L'état, c'est moi." The Imperial Family is the ultimate "place of nothingness" that softly embraces everything and is capable of becoming the transnational, ecological, non-centric center of the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere. That might have been rhetorically beautiful, but I don't think it was ever possible to gain Asian people's agreement by telling them that the Japanese Imperial Family as a "place of nothingness" would softly embrace Asia as a whole.

Ho: Tanabe suggested that the Emperor become a symbol of Zettai-mu, "absolute nothingness," and I think that this idea is interesting rhetorically and aesthetically. But I will just go back a little bit to Suzuki, since he is the protagonist that you started with. I first knew about Suzuki in my readings about John Cage, learning about Suzuki's influence on what we might call "Californian Zen." But I must say I was very disturbed when I read some of Suzuki's earlier writings. After the war, Suzuki seems to be known in the West as a pacifist but, I think, in around 1896, right after the First Sino-Japanese war, he said that the war against China was a religious action. So there seems to have been a big shift.

If you also read what the rest of the Kyoto School scholars spoke about, for example in the *Chuo Koron* discussions, they could be said to have been against the war, but at the same time, they seem to have been against the war only with America but not against the rest of Asia. It is as though what was happening with the rest of Asia didn't even truly count as war, and that it was considered almost the right of Japanese moral leadership over the rest of Asia with this idea of the Co-Prosperity Sphere that you mentioned.

I think that these inconsistencies that you described could be pointed out in Nishida's thought system. But for me, these inconsistencies spread deeper and further than even the thought of Nishida. I see Nishida himself as simply a symptom of something else that was going on, for example in Zen and its close connection with Samurai culture. In the softness and watery nature of Zen that you described, I think that there is also simultaneously a certain hardness, as hard as the blade of a Samurai. These inconsistencies or contradictions were what interested me about the Kyoto School. And I think that this is somehow related to the contradictions of how Japanese Pan-Asianism turned out. What began with a Utopian dimension turned out very wrong to me, and to many people in the rest of Asia. For me, these contradictions, I think, is the aporia, the abyss, which we are speaking about.

To continue on the same thread, I would say that these same inconsistencies could be found in the notion of Pan-Asianism itself. To be truly Pan-Asian entails a certain dissolution of the borders between Asian nations. Yet in those early years of the 20th century, we see that Pan-Asianist discourses in Japan were in fact, at the same time, a highly nationalistic movement. So I think, for example, in Japan, that there was a very interesting and rich vein of history in the earlier 20th century, when many nationalist, anti-colonial leaders from all over Asia had connections with Japanese right-wing, Pan-Asianist organizations. We see this with the Vietnamese nationalists, Indian nationalists and also the Chinese, for example Dr. Sun Yat-sen. It was an interesting contradiction that one could be Pan-Asian and nationalistic at the same time.

Over time, I began associating this contradiction with the inconsistencies inherent in the notion of “emptiness” or the “void” that you mentioned earlier, and how difficult it is to articulate it. Thus the “void” becomes very malleable, easy to shape and deform and be used for different political purposes. These are some of the ongoing questions I have about Nishida and his legacy. But at the same time, after having expressed all of these more critical thoughts, I would also say that upon reading Nishida’s first book, *An Inquiry into the Good*, I find myself being quite moved in an emotional way. The book is notoriously difficult, but at the same time, you see in the book this struggle, just to put it simply, of how to live with the West, what is the meaning of the East and the West, and this ambition of coming up with new foundation of thoughts for this moment in history. I think the ambition itself is moving and something we don’t see that often today.



Another Guest: Junichiro Tanizaki

Asada: I said that while Nishida was too rhetorical, Suzuki was clear and that contributed to the promotion of the idea of Zen to the whole world. However, on the other hand, I agree with you that Nishida was deeper than Suzuki. He had a conflict that he couldn’t sort out and continued to think about. Suzuki appears to be shallow compared to that.

There is a book titled *The Standpoint of World History and Japan*, the compilation of three roundtables that started right before the attack on Pearl Harbor and continued until the next year. As you said, the roundtables were published in the *Chuo Koron* magazine, and the speakers were Masaaki Kosaka, Iwao Koyama, Shigetaka Suzuki and Keiji Nishitani, who were students of Nishida and Tanabe. Moreover, a little after the Pearl Harbor, a large-scale roundtable titled “Overcoming Modernity” that involved also writers and literary critics was held and published in the *Bungakukai* magazine. In addition to the Kyoto School, Katsuichiro Kamei of Nihon Roman-Ha (Japan Romantic School, though its true leader was Yojuro Yasuda) and the “Bungakukai” Group participated in it (this classification into the Kyoto School, Japan Romantic School and “Bungakukai” Group was established by Bunso Hashikawa, which Yoshimi Takeuchi took over).

While Nishida was in a sense deep, which made his philosophy puzzling and difficult to decipher, what the four panelists of the “Standpoint of World History and Japan” roundtable discuss within the West-versus-East scheme is very clear. It’s easy to follow their argument, but so what? It’s so formal, abstract and empty. In contrast to them, the Japan Romantic School tells you to “leap before you look,” i.e., “You must dive into the void.” On the other hand, the “Bungakukai” Group including Hideo Kobayashi has a good understanding of Western literature and knows that Western modernity is not that simple and cannot be overcome that effortlessly. If I were to identify the most spiritually influential party on Kamikaze pilots who were searching for their motivation to die, I think the fanatic agitation by the Japan Romantic School that invited them to the false leap into the void — “I don’t know for what I’m going to die, but anyway I’ve already decided to do that” — might have worked more efficiently than the schematic abstraction of the Kyoto School.

You kind of transformed the Kiraku-Tei into a fighter aircraft — the giant fan in the room upstairs really felt like a propeller of a fighter, and I was reminded not only of the Kyoto School but also of the Japan Romantic School standing in front of the fan.

Another interesting guest that I would have liked to see in *Hotel Aporia* is Junichiro Tanizaki. The January 1943 issue of the *Chuo Koron* magazine featured the final part of the three Kyoto School roundtables titled “The Philosophy of World-historical Wars,” and the March issue had “World-historical Wars and Ideological Warfare” by Iwao Koyama. The January issue was quite intense, also starting the serials of *The Gate to the East* by Toson Shimazaki and *The Makioka Sisters* by Junichiro Tanizaki. On the cover of the issue, you see the titles “The Philosophy of World-historical Wars” on the left and “The Gate to the East” and “The Makioka Sisters” on the right. Now we know that *The Makioka Sisters* was absolutely the winner. Toson died in August, so *The Gate to the East* stopped soon and was left unfinished. However, while the philosophers and historians are seriously discussing the “philosophy of world-historical wars,” *The Makioka Sisters* by Tanizaki endlessly depicts trivial details of the daily life of the four sisters of a merchant family in Osaka, such as their complaint about squeaky sounds that a new Obi belt for their Kimono makes. It is radical. Apparently the authority knew very well that it was radical. They must have put pressure on the publisher, and the discontinuation of the serial was announced on the June issue: “In response to the requirements in the current situation where we are fighting the decisive battle, we have decided to exercise self-restraint in the publication of the novel *The Makioka Sisters* by Mr. Junichiro Tanizaki as a serial in this magazine, unfortunately being unable to ignore the risk of spreading unfavorable influence.” It is interesting to compare this with the current issue of the freedom of expression, and I’m not sure if we have made any progress since then. (laugh) Tanizaki secretly continued to write *The Makioka Sisters* in the middle of the war and completed the masterpiece that is still being read while the “philosophy of world-historical wars” has been forgotten. In that sense, I think Tanizaki could have been writing alone in one of the rooms of *Hotel Aporia*.

Ho: Actually Tanizaki was one of the first “guests” that I wanted to invite to the Ryokan and, in fact, in the end, he did make a guest appearance in the work. In the room in *Hotel Aporia* which is occupied by the giant fan, we referred to Tanizaki’s *In Praise of Shadows*. He was speaking about the alcove in a traditional Japanese house, and how having modern electric lights in the house destroys the shadows in the alcove. For Tanizaki, the alcove should always be shaded because the void, emptiness, should never be stared directly into. If you use electric lights, the emptiness within the alcove becomes too clear. We should never stare into nothingness too clearly. I always thought this was one of the wisest possible comments one could make to the Kyoto School scholars whose foundational idea was “absolute nothingness.” Maybe absolute nothingness is better off if we can have a little bit of shading or shadows on it.

Asada: I apologize for my forgetfulness. I must have noticed that Tanizaki was quoted when I saw the work, but I somehow forgot that. So, the ghost of Tanizaki also inhabits *Hotel Aporia* and criticizes the Kyoto School from the inside.

Ho: I think Tanizaki's book became a very important way by which I understood the space of the Kiraku-Tei. I am usually a video artist who work with projections, and my works are usually placed in black boxes or white cubes which, to put it reductively, have the proportions and dimensions of Western art spaces. For example, you need height to place the projector way above the audience, so that the audience will not cast any shadows. But this becomes completely different when doing projections in a space like the Kiraku-Tei where the height of the ceiling is low. Of my first visit to the Kiraku-Tei, I recall the feeling of always walking around as silently as possible, while bending. It is as though I was always bowing. I remember also being very concerned about the wiring that would go into the projectors and speakers as Tanizaki was very critical about electric wires running around a traditional Japanese house. From a very early stage, we discussed with the technicians to create the screens for our projections, by using only wood that matches the color of the wood within the building, and without adding any nails to the site. So I would say Tanizaki is not only a ghost — he is quite an omnipresent ghost in terms of the physical setup of the space.

Similarities between Tanizaki and Ozu

Ho: Just one last thing, I am now trying to go back and reconnect with the other guest, Ozu, who was also omnipresent. The way the images are projected in the Kiraku-Tei, with the screens lowered to the floor and with us seated on Tatami mats, immediately created for me a relationship with Ozu's camera. It is well known that the height of his camera for indoor shots is lower than the cameras, let's say, in Western movies. This is because most of his protagonists are seated on Tatami and recorded at that angle. Thinking about how we perceive and experience these spatial dimensions became for me an interesting way to return to this very old question of the East and the West, and their meeting or their clash.

Asada: Yes, I was aware of that. The prevalent misconception about Tanizaki is that he rejected the bright, extensional space of the West and shut himself in the dark, intensional space of Japan. However, he was essentially an epicurean and led a comfortable life using electrical appliances with their cables hidden. He loved shadows because our gorgeous Kimonos would appear more beautifully with a low, wavering candle light than electric top light. He was not interested in conversation with himself in a frugal, dark space like a Zazen meditation hall but just wanted to see gorgeous things mysteriously shimmering in shadows. Indeed, Tanizaki was interested in cinema in its early stage, wrote novels for film adaptations, and went out with actresses of the films. Though Tanizaki's taste and Ozu's aesthetics differ, perhaps they had a lot in common. The fact that Ozu didn't make the film about the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperty Sphere for which he was sent to Singapore and just lived in comfort there watching American films that he couldn't see in Japan might have been similar to the attitude of Tanizaki.

Ho: I think the way I perceive Ozu is that he is completely modern. I mean this is the way he lived, and dressed, if we look at photographs of him. The position of someone like Tanizaki or Ozu with regards to the question of tradition and modernity in their work is complex to the point of being somewhat ambiguous. One shot that I like a lot from Ozu, which was borrowed for *Hotel Aporia*, was when the main character played by Ryu Chishu in *Late Spring* was packing his books, a copy of Nietzsche's *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* was revealed. The appearance of this German philosopher in the work of Ozu's film, which seems to be a family drama, is already very interesting, and I believe it's definitely a deliberate touch.

Actually, the magazine *Chuo Koron* also appeared in another scene from Ozu's *Late Spring*. The character played by Ryu Chishu was on a train, and he was reading this same magazine which had published the discussions of the Kyoto School philosophers. Yet all of these references are very lightly woven into the texture of his film. This absence of clear, easily classifiable positions — I think this is what makes their works endlessly rich. They are already aporias. So in many ways they are perfect guests for *Hotel Aporia*.

Just kind of going back to the earlier point that we were discussing between literature and philosophy, I think that the way I conceived of *Hotel Aporia* is that it was not so much a work about the Kyoto School or the Kamikaze pilots or Ozu or Yokoyama but rather, what I was interested in was something between them, or maybe, something below them. But now that I think about it, when we say "below," it sounds like a deeper foundation in the ground, so perhaps I should avoid that and stick with something "passing between" them, like the wind, and the wind was a recurrent feature in the work, being the wind of the Kamikaze or the wind of emptiness in Keiji Nishitani.

As I was working on *Hotel Aporia*, one of my biggest questions to myself was that I was never exactly sure what my point was. There did not seem to be a definite point that I was moving towards, and this worried me until the moment I had finished the work. At that point I realized that this absence of a point was the point of the work.

Asada: There has been a trend where artists look into history or folklore and make up an artwork out of it in the name of research-based work. It is not necessarily a bad trend, but it sometimes feels, "Isn't it more productive to write a historical, anthropological or ethnological report or book than to create this artwork?" Meanwhile, *Hotel Aporia* is nothing but an artwork in that it presents what cannot be put together into a consistent report or book. What you have just said is extremely important in that sense. Based on your thorough research, the Kyoto School, Junichiro Tanizaki, Yasujiro Ozu and Ryuichi Yokoyama are placed in the hotel where the Kamikaze pilots were offered ceremonial dinner, but the most important thing is the wind that blows between them.

In Toyota City, there is also the work by Tadasu Takamine, the vertically lifted concrete floor of the swimming pool of the closed high school that appears to be a silent epitaph for the coming Olympic Games. Emitting a lot of noise through its silence, the work has impressed many visitors in spite of, or precisely because of, its unintelligibility, while in your *Hotel Aporia*, the wind and clattering noise pass through the echoes of various contradicting voices. The Aichi Triennale must have been very meaningful even if it offered only the experience of these two masterpieces in Toyota City.



The Struggle Continues

Q1: I was impressed by the fact that the faces of all the characters in Ozu's films were erased. I would like to hear how and why you conceived the idea.

Ho: There are a few different reasons. I would say that the first is that the erasure of the faces makes them anyone and no one at the same time. I think it makes their faces into screens, on which the spectator can project any face. The second reason is that I was assuming that many of the audience members from Japan would be familiar with these Ozu films and actors, and might recall the faces of these actors. For me, the recollection of the audience introduces a different type of time into the work. The time of your past experience of watching the Ozu films is now activated and overlaid onto the present encounter with *Hotel Aporia*. The third would be, I thought, that it might help with the copyright issue, but I am not very sure if it made any difference in this regard. (laugh)

Q2: I had both positive and negative impressions. The "faceless" images appeared to me as anonymous images of Japanese people, or the representation of traditional Japanese people in general. Ozu's films had been said to depict traditional Japanese people, but Shigehiko Hasumi criticized the view in his books on Ozu. Did you read Hasumi's books while working on this piece?

Q2: I had both positive and negative impressions. The "faceless" images appeared to me as anonymous images of Japanese people, or the representation of traditional Japanese people in general. Ozu's films had been said to depict traditional Japanese people, but Shigehiko Hasumi criticized the view in his books on Ozu. Did you read Hasumi's books while working on this piece?

Asada: Let me respond while you [interpreter] are translating for Tzu Nyen. I don't think anyone thinks the faceless humans represent the traditional Japanese. I think that the faces are erased to make the films unidentifiable, while maintaining Ozu's signature. If you identify Chishu Ryu or Setsuko Hara, you identify the film. It can be said that the films appear to be sci-fi movies in a sense, but it can never be said that they return to the traditional representation of the Japanese or the stereotypical interpretation of Ozu. I think it's the opposite.

Ho: Actually, for me, erasing the face is not so much an attempt to represent a specific type of person but an attempt not to represent, to have the most empty containers possible. I am not sure if the book you have mentioned has been translated into English. My research is done with books in English and that is my limitation, but this also explains the form of the script in *Hotel Aporia*, which is made up of email exchanges between myself, Yoko Nose-san, and Tomoyuki Arai-san, who was my dramaturge and researcher, and their engagement with Japanese sources and materials. This dialogic form seemed to be the only honest way I could take to produce this work, to reveal something of its processes. But this book you mentioned sounds very interesting.

Q3-1: Professor Asada said that the triennial was successful, but I am concerned that the next edition of the triennial can be influenced somehow by the issue. What does professor think?

Asada: I don't like to be called "professor." (laugh) It is written there that I am a "thinker," but I have never called myself a thinker or philosopher. I'm just a critic. That being said, I didn't just mean to be optimistic. I also meant that it was a big trouble and there will be difficulties. At the final stage of the triennial, as soon as the media reported that the Aichi Prefecture intended to restart the "After 'Freedom of Expression?'" exhibition, the Agency for Cultural Affairs suddenly declared that they would cancel their subsidy for the triennial that had been approved, which is ridiculous. So, the struggle will continue, but wasn't it better to learn from the triennial that we are living in that kind of country than to simply enjoy "diverse works of art" in it? In other words, culture in general including art has always been a place of ideological conflict. Some people involve themselves in it as activists, and others keep distance from activism. As I said in the beginning, I respect the insistence and effort of the governor and executive committee chairman as well as the artistic director, but it is also good that there are artists who criticize them for committing censorship even if that might have been a temporary measure. In the middle of these contradictions, the curators and artists took on their own struggle patiently and creatively, and at the final stage, although in a limited form, the exhibition that had been closed was reopened. That was an achievement, and must be an inspiration for struggle in the future.

Q3-2: Some artists pulled their works out in response to the issue. What did you think of the continuation of your installation?

Ho: I think, like every single other artist in the triennial, I had considered very seriously to pull my work out, but at the same time, I had the feeling that maybe my work, the questions that it was asking, was somehow connected to what is actually happening to the triennial. So eventually I felt that perhaps the most productive thing to do was to let it continue to resonate with this current situation. I think the artists who pulled out their works made a very difficult and painful decision, but I think it is also a difficult decision when you decide not to pull your work out.

Asada: That inspired me to insert the cover of the *Chuo Koron* magazine, where the Kyoto School and Junichiro Tanizaki co-existed, in the simple handout that I distributed to you today. I think it resonates with some of the themes of Tzu Nyen's work and the current situation around freedom of expression.



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Aichi Triennale 2019 official website
<https://aichitriennale.jp/en/artwork/T04.html>