

American Studies in Japan; Japan in American Studies: Challenges of the Heterolingual Address

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In his book *Translation and Subjectivity: On "Japan" and Cultural Nationalism*, Naoki Sakai explores the question of the production of subjectivity in an intercultural environment, such as that between the West and the non-West, through the figure of translation. It is important to add, however, that for Sakai translation is not simply the act of transfer between units of two self-contained languages that exist regardless of whether translation takes place. Rather, he sees translation as the a priori condition, the very ground that enables linguistic exchange to proceed as if languages were autonomous, individuated phenomena. For Sakai, that is to say, translation is the name for an ongoing, unstoppable state of transindividual interaction, a social relation that structures human signification on the basis of its incessant iterative performances.

In light of the figure of translation delineated in these terms, Sakai further proposes what he calls the practice of heterolingual address, a type of speech act in which the otherness of the audience—defined not only in terms of their languages but also in terms of their habits, histories, cultures, assumptions, preferences, etc. —is never repressed but acknowledged, and included/inscribed in the very process of information delivery and exchange. To explain what he means, Sakai refers to the simple convention of the pronoun “we,” usually used by a speaker to designate a putative collectivity between himself and the audience:

“we” comprise an essentially mixed audience among whom the addresser’s relation to the addressee could hardly be imagined to be one of unruffled empathetic transference, and to address myself to such an audience by saying “we” was to reach out to the addressees without either an assurance of immediate apprehension or an expectation of uniform response from them. “We” are rather a nonaggregate community; for the addressees would respond to my delivery with varying degrees of comprehension, including cases of the zero degree at which they would miss its signification completely. I want to call this manner of relating the addresser to the addressees the heterolingual address.¹

In the heterolingual address, therefore, the act of inception or reception occurs as the act of translation, and translation takes place at every listening or reading.²

Ultimately, the heterolingual address functions in Sakai’s account of

intercultural exchange as a kind of categorical imperative, the conscious adoption of an ethical attitude—the attitude of the widest possible inclusion. The reason for this is simple: it is only when we adopt such an attitude that we would be prepared to come to terms with the otherness that not only unexpectedly but also inevitably resides in our addressees, whoever they happen to be. The heterolingual address is what makes it possible for us to seriously confront rather than simply assimilate or neutralize “foreigners” in our act of enunciation, including especially those who may not be prepared to understand us or agree with us; those “cases of the zero degree at which they would miss [our] signification completely.”

When first invited to address this summer seminar on American Studies, my immediate reaction was one of professional unease: I am, strictly speaking, an outsider to the academic specialization called American Studies and not exactly qualified to speak. What could I possibly offer the audience? Although, as you will hear, I do now have something to say, it is with a mixture of naiveté and curiosity that I venture into this territory. Sakai’s discussion of the heterolingual address, in particular, has helped me rethink foreignness itself: being an outsider, Sakai shows me, need not translate into an absolute inhibition about speaking; the more challenging task is rather to articulate (my “foreign” reception of) American Studies in a form of address that does not presume any putative collectivity between my audience and myself, but instead takes the uncertainty thereof as a point of departure, with the goal of creating, in the process of speaking, a new kind of “we,” a collectivity based on the ineluctability of heterolinguality. Pushed to its logical extreme, the heterolingual address would be the kind of speech act that strives to acknowledge the presence of multiple perspectives among our fellow interlocutors and aims to be as inclusionary as possible of the heterogeneity thus involved.

With the political and practical ubiquity of America’s presence—the United States’ domination of world politics since the end of the Second World War, to be specific—the first question posed by American Studies (to me as an outsider to the specialization) is the status of America: is it a traditional object of study, to be accessed, defined, and elaborated with a kind of disinterested academic gaze, supported by the usual scholarly apparatus? Presumably, if the answer to this question is yes, there is already a history of this objectification, which can itself be examined. At what point did that history begin, and under what conditions of possibility? What are the events and paradigms that were considered legitimate contents or constituents of that history?³ At the same time, it seems to me, the sheer magnitude of America’s world power since 1945 means that the study of America must somehow go beyond this more traditional trajectory in which it could simply have taken its place among an infinite plurality of objects and share “disinterested” scholarly attention among a multitude of possible examples. Such magnitude of power compels us to approach America in ways that exceed a routine object of study with set boundaries. As William Spanos argues, for

instance, it is precisely American exceptionalism, definable as “the perennial belief in America’s unique ameliorative global mission in the world” and upheld for so long by American Studies scholars of an older generation, which necessitates historical, ontological, and linguistic scrutiny. Without such scrutiny, American Studies as a field of inquiry will likely remain, “as the inordinate focus of its criticism on the literature and culture of the United States suggests, vestigially inscribed by the exceptionalist code” and continue in its “disciplinary parochialism.”⁴

The second question that may be posed to, about, and by American Studies is therefore a more theoretical one, having to do with discursive politics: how to speak about an object that, in effect, has become so large and preemptive that it tends to set the terms/criteria for the way knowledge is produced, indeed negotiated, disseminated, and legitimated around the contemporary world? America in this sense is really a force field whose geopolitical, linguistic, and technological reach keeps expanding, and which can thus not be reduced to an object with securely determinable characteristics or limits. Instead, insofar as it represents progress and advancement—to many, the pinnacle of human civilization—America stands in another kind of trajectory altogether—a teleological one, to be exact, in which it is supposedly the ultimate goal and final destination for all other cultures. Reversely, as this goal and destination, America has also become the condition of possibility for these other cultures, in the sense that it is against America that such cultures’ successes or failures are now measured.

This sense of America as a force field which subsumes the relevance of other cultural instances, and which, whether or not we like it, provides the very terms on which other cultural instances tend to be judged, is what seems to me a more urgent, if also controversial, way to engage with American Studies. In this instance, the status of America is no longer simply that of an object of study or even a field of scholarship with a local history but also an ever-shifting international dynamics of power negotiation and possession: whether or not we consciously speak of America, it has, somehow, already spoken (of) us.⁵

When American Studies is the occasion for a gathering outside the United States, such as the present one, the opportunity that awaits us is that of probing what the categorical imperative of the heterolingual address would entail and can enable. I feel obligated to reflect on how such an address would include in it an articulation with Japan, not because Nagoya happens to be the location of this meeting and I simply want to be courteous to our host, but because of Japan’s complicated, entangled history with the United States since the mid-nineteenth century. To suggest what some constituents of such a heterolingual address about America and Japan might be in a context in which the audience is bound to have different expectations and ideas about nationhood, culture, and globalization, allow me, in the rest of my lecture, to briefly discuss two films. If the point of the heterolingual address, as delineated by Sakai, is sensitivity and responsiveness to

the foreign in our midst, can film be an occasion, indeed a medium, for such an address? If so, how might the specifics of film language be (re)conceptualized and articulated with a view to such foreignness, in ways that go beyond reification and exoticization?

2.

On a previous visit to Japan, in the summer of 2005, when I spoke at an international conference on Japanese cinema, I discussed Akira Kurosawa's *No Regrets for Our Youth* (1946), a film based on the controversy of the dismissal, in 1933, of a Kyoto University law professor, Takigawa Yukitoki, on grounds of his pro-communist views by the then Education Minister Hatoyama. Kurosawa's film interested me because its narrative structure provides a discursive opening for rethinking political issues such as fascism, imperialism, and militarism with a transnational awareness. Kurosawa achieved this by a noticeable transition in the story, whereby the main woman character, Yukie, undergoes a personal transformation from being a Westernized, bourgeois university student to being a sympathizer with the peasants' and women's movements in Japan's postwar countryside.⁶

Despite what seems to be its realism, the narrative transition in *No Regrets for Our Youth* is, I argued, Kurosawa's means of articulating Japan with America in ways that would become increasingly acute in the postwar world. Although, for American Occupation censorship reasons, there are no explicit representations of the Second World War in the diegesis (except for the announcement, in 1941, of Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor and then eventually of Japan's loss of the war), this narrative mechanism bridges the world of the 1930s and 1940s, in which Japan was dominated by the furor over war (both in the form of pro-war and anti-war sentiments) and the postwar one that apparently embraces the "peace-loving" ways of Japanese agrarian life. In her function as the narrative hinge, Yukie objectifies this narrative transition by turning herself into a dutiful widow and daughter-in-law, a hardworking peasant woman who is determined to vindicate her husband's (misunderstood) patriotism in the eyes of the community. Yukie's feminine hands and fingers, which once produced the tunes of Western music on the piano, are now shown to labor steadily in the soil, cultivating rice for the village.

In this simple temporal movement—what appears to be a series of successive chronological happenings in a moral fable—emerges a stark sense of what I'd call epistemic uncertainty. If the narrative transition is not simply a natural order of things but an event in itself, I asked, what are we to make of the shift between the early and final parts of the story? As mentioned, the early part of the story takes place in contemporary, urban Japan in what might be called a progressive time (the 1930s): all the trappings of Westernization, including the activist, anti-fascist sentiments, are there, propelling Japan toward a future in which it can

become not only a mimic of but an equal to the West. The latter part of the story (first near the end of the war and then after it, in the mid-1940s), by contrast, returns us to a rural environment in which the most important activity is the cultivation of rice. Rather than the progressive time already encountered in the earlier part, we find here a time that seems backward-and inward-looking, as though the process of national soul-searching in the aftermath of political and military defeat must involve a (re)turn, literally, to roots and a hands-on working-through of those roots. (At one point, Yukie says: “I have found my roots in that village.”) The politics of temporality set up in the narrative transition thus evokes the classic opposition between Westernized modernity and non-Western native tradition, with the paradox that the seemingly backward and inward, spiritualist (re)turn to Japan’s “roots” is at the same time shown as a forward advancement (including a proto-feminist awareness of women’s liberation). That is to say, the rehabilitation of tradition is now given to us, the audience, as the viable way of moving on to the future.

Is the latter part of the story really a logical follow-up to the earlier one then? Who exactly is making this claim, and to whom is it directed? If the film is taken as a kind of heterolingual address in Sakai’s terms, the perspectives being implicitly or explicitly invoked are mind-boggling. Was Kurosawa primarily addressing the national Japanese audience, who, to all appearances, belonged to the same community as he? Was he at the same time calling forth—constructing through the medium of film—another kind of community, one that is not uniformly or necessarily predisposed to hearing the same message? When interpreted as a heterolingual, rather than simply monolingual (or mono-national and monocultural), address, the film’s fantastical narrative transition, with its puzzling juxtaposition of the two apparently incommensurable parts, the “before” and “after,” merits interrogation.

If the stigmatization and ostracization faced by Yukie’s husband’s (Noge’s) family is an allegory of the stigmatization and ostracization faced by Japan in the community of nations at the end of the war, it is through an unconditional submission and dedication to the goal of collective self-fashioning and-refashioning—exactly the kind of aggressive affectivity that bolstered both Japan’s militarism and the violence of its anti-militarist activism before and during the war—that Noge’s family, led by Yukie, now tries to extricate itself from its predicament. Albeit a peaceful corrective, then, the return to the soil seems in tune with patterns of obsessive mental and physical behavior that were already inscribed in Japan’s wartime catastrophe in the first place. In both cases, it is about persisting in (re)gaining footing in and recognition by a hostile world, with a stubborn investment in Japan’s exceptionalism, as is typically justified in what came to be known as Nihonjinron (the Discourse on the Japanese).

Viewed as an attempt at heterolingual address, directed not only at a uniform or predictable Japanese audience but also at a postwar international public occupied in multiple senses by the United States, the narrative transition that

happens between the first and second part of this “Japanese” movie may therefore be grasped as the enunciation of a certain redefined geotemporal politics in relation to America. Made very soon after the war, the film hails the audience as members of a new global configuration—a kind of “us”—dominated by America and its own version of expansionism and Orientalism vis-à-vis the Pacific. Ironically, too, this was the period in which the official American Occupation forbade the representation of Occupation forces in Japanese films: “the American censors tried not only to suppress criticism of it [the Occupation], but also to hide the very fact that Japan was being occupied at all and that foreign officials were closely supervising the Japanese media.”⁷ This active prohibition of reference to a political and military presence meant that (for a filmmaker such as Kurosawa) the historicity of Japan’s so-called “second chance” of the postwar years had to be dealt with by indirect means. To this extent, the strikingly incongruent temporalities of Kurosawa’s film narrative can be read—irrespective of Kurosawa’s personal convictions and intentions—as a kind of response to this prohibition, a response that takes the form of a silent decoding of the destinies scripted for the Pacific in its postwar transactions with the United States and the rest of the capitalist Western world.

First among these postwar transactions (between Japan and the West) is the inducement of discipline that takes the form of a rationalistic submission and dedication to the work ethic. From the ashes of the war, Japan was to rise to the status of a global economic power through quantifiable capitalist productivity (in the form of industry and manufacture). This phenomenon, encouraged and supported by the United States in its attempt to arrest the spread of communism in East Asia, was to replicate itself in the emergence of the so-called Asian Tigers (Taiwan, South Korea, Singapore, and Hong Kong) in the 1970s and 1980s, and finally, since the 1990s, in the rise in world status of an ideologically capitulating and complicit People’s Republic of China.

Second, even though this magical capacity for work is an indispensable ingredient in the post-industrial capitalist vision of economic growth, in *No Regrets for Our Youth* it is enigmatically associated with another kind of time—the time of the peasant, of agriculture, and of country life. As has become clear in the case of contemporary China, the demands and rewards of capitalism always mean the uprooting of countryside populations and massive migrations to urban areas where work opportunities are more abundant. To valorize the work ethic through an affirmation of a return to the soil is thus, as Kurosawa’s narrative suggests, to place Japan in an impossible bind: if Japan and Asia are given recognition as participants in the global present through their dedication to work, such dedication is granted intelligibility only as the attribute of a non-present time (that is, the attribute of a continuous tradition, an essentialist “Asian-ness,” and so forth).⁸

The schematization of the story into two kinds of temporalities, a mere technicality of the plot for some audiences, turns in this manner into a

heterolingual and heterocultural manner of addressing—both in the sense of speaking about and in the sense of speaking to—America. To the postwar international public, the address enunciates America, as Spanos suggests in his essay on American Studies, as a kind of thinking/language (rather than as a bounded object), whose effects are felt precisely in the ontological rupture—the enigmatic splitting of Japanese society between the two temporalities I just described. Enigmatic, because it is, within the film diegesis, unclear from where such a splitting could arise: what causes the rupture in the first place? Can the problems of modernity and urbanization be resolved through a return to agriculture and country life? Can Japan abandon its fascism and militarism, and simply “start over” again by growing rice? In retrospect, what is being foregrounded in the narrative transition is the problematic nature of an imaginary effort at cultural recommencement, or cultural re-origination, under the American-centric circumstances after the war.

Considered in this manner, the supposedly forward-but slightly awkward-looking image of Yukie on her final return to the village (as she climbs on to the truck with the help of other villagers) gives us a good clue to Kurosawa’s conception of the problems at hand. As the leader of the democratic culture movement—a symbol of hopefulness, will power, and emancipation—Yukie’s face seems rather out of sync with the villagers, who represent the future yet who are also quite capable of being stuck in bigotry and malice. It is perhaps in this complex series of significations, shuttling throughout the film among personal, communal, national, and international levels of intensity, and superimposed on one another to produce Yukie’s face itself as a time-image, that we should come to terms with Kurosawa’s statement “this woman I wanted to show as the new Japan.”⁹

To sum up, my point about *No Regrets for My Youth* is that it may be considered as a cinematically mediated heterolingual address, in which the epistemic contradictions and incommensurabilities of imagining Japan’s contemporaneity in the postwar world in terms of its rice-growing ritual, its return to a pure, rustic Japaneseness, are plainly acknowledged and staged rather than being suppressed. How would we respond as the recipients of or interlocutors with such an address, especially from the point of American Studies?

3.

In the second to last film he made in his career, *Rhapsody in August* (1991), Kurosawa stages the problematic of the Japan-United States relationship through another, much older, female character, Kane, a grandmother of four teenagers who are spending their summer vacation in her farm house outside Nagasaki, while their parents (Kane’s son, Tadao, and daughter, Yoshie) are in Hawaii visiting an elder brother of Kane’s, Suzujiro Haruno, who had emigrated to the United States in 1920. The old woman, we soon learn, is a widow whose

husband, a schoolteacher, was among the civilians killed in Nagasaki on August 9, 1945, when the United States dropped the second atomic bomb on Japan. While enjoying their time together with Granny (even though they do not like her cooking) and recalling what happened in Nagasaki at the end of the war, the young people receive a letter from their parents with pictures of their relatives on the other side of the Pacific. Suzujiro, who married a white American woman who is deceased, is quite ill, and his son, Clark, is managing the family's sizeable pineapple farm business. From the pictures, Kane's extended family clearly live the enviable life of the well-to-do in America. Tadao, Yoshie, and Clark all urge Kane to go to Hawaii and see her dying brother.

In an attempt to persuade their mother, Tadao and Yoshie fly back to Japan, only to find on their arrival that Kane has, with the help of the grandchildren, already sent off a telegram to the Hawaii relatives, indicating her willingness to visit after she has attended the annual memorial service for her husband. Anxious that this mention of the past would upset the Hawaii relatives and thus spoil their own business prospects in the United States, Tadao and Yoshie become rather annoyed at their mother's embarrassing gesture, especially when they soon hear that Clark, on receiving Kane's telegram, has decided to come for a visit himself.

The rest of the film shows the three generations of the family playing host to Clark after he arrives, fussing over making him comfortable, answering his questions about the family and their Grandfather (his Uncle), and taking him to visit various sites, such as the elementary school playground in Nagasaki where schoolchildren were killed by the atomic blast on August 9, 1945, the commemoration ceremony in the village honoring Grandfather and other victims, the pond by the waterfall where the children like to spend their time playing (and where Clark receives the news that his father has just died). We also see Clark having a conversation with Kane in which he apologizes for not knowing what had happened to her in the past and she repeatedly responds, "It's all right." After Clark's departure, Tadao and Yoshie are about to take off again, only to notice that something seems to have overtaken Kane's mind, causing her to act as though she were back in 1945. She mistakes Tadao for her elder brother and, at the light and sound of a thunderstorm, hastens to cover the sleeping children's bodies with white sheets so as to shield them from the glare of what she thinks is the atomic blast. The next morning, a neighbor comes with the news that Kane, probably seeing how the cloud patterns resemble the cloud patterns on August 9, 1945, has headed off for Nagasaki to look for her husband. The last series of scenes shows the family members running in the storm to try to catch up with her. The scene finally ends with Kane forging ahead, her umbrella turned inside out, while the noise of the wind and rain gives way to a children's choir singing the song "Heidenröselein" (Franz Schubert's setting of Goethe's early 19th-century poem of the same name, translated as "The Heathrose"), the tune that one of Kane's grandchildren has been trying to play on her old pedal organ since the beginning of the film.

In contrast to the enigmatic temporal transition in *No Regrets for Our Youth*, the engagement with the Second World War and with America in *Rhapsody in August* takes the form of memory. Although, as in the earlier film, narrative is key to our grasp of the *mise-en-scène*, it is less a matter of a progression of external events than a recollection of catastrophic happenings, a recollection that materializes somewhat randomly, in the children's conversations among themselves and with Kane over the course of several weeks. Even as we become aware of the weighty history that Kane has been bearing for forty-some years, however, Kurosawa offers no newsreel footage or direct voice-over journalistic accounts of that history. The conspicuous absence of such documentary evidence of the original happening (reminding us of the absence of any images of the war or any direct reference to the American Occupation in *No Regrets for Our Youth*) renders the act of recollection all the more evocative, as the audience is left to imagine what it must have been like. As we visit, first with the children and then with Clark, a scene of the crime—the playground in the elementary school in Nagasaki where Kane's husband was presumably killed together with the schoolchildren, and where the monument of a twisted jungle gym stands as the only visible index to the tragedy of destruction—the present becomes foregrounded as the time in which both the characters and the audience must come to terms with what is remembered.

Such foregrounding of the present raises the stakes for the heterolingual address to an acute level. Following the narrative that results from memory and recollection, the audience must negotiate its reactions to a myriad of implied relations: Japan as a victim to the atomic bombs and to America's ultimate acts of aggression; Japan's own record of imperialism and its victims in the rest of Asia; Japan's reconstruction of itself as a pacifist nation since the end of the war; reactionary Japanese politicians' denial to this day of Japan's war crimes; the history of Japanese Americans in the United States, and so forth. By withholding the customary imagistic and narrational reminders, and by focusing our attention on the time of now, Kurosawa has, I believe, once again opened up a space, one that is, like that in *No Regrets for Our Youth*, epistemic in import. But whereas in the earlier film the staging of epistemic rupture serves to foreshadow Japan's postwar existence in a global situation dominated by America, in *Rhapsody in August* what is of interest is less a temporal transition than the portentous yet mundane question of authority and agency in the aftermath of an unimaginable disaster. How are people supposed to behave when their loved ones are killed in war? *Vis-à-vis* the aggressor, in this case America, how are an atomic bomb widow and her children supposed to survive?

Tadao and Yoshie offer one kind of answer: for them it is better simply to be silent about the past because the former aggressors, citizens of an international superpower, must continue to be treated with kid gloves; having cordial relations with them is of vital importance to Japanese self-interest. Kane herself, on the contrary, insists that there is nothing wrong with speaking about the past because

there is nothing wrong with speaking truthfully; in that insistence, which seems to be shared (perhaps not entirely comprehendingly) by Kane's grandchildren, we find a refreshing alternative to the unctuous and obsequious attitudes personified by her son and daughter. Even so, Kane's memory is thrust into a new realm of complexity by the arrival of Clark. The pain she has been shouldering for forty-some years is now unexpectedly brought into sharp focus and subjected to the gaze of an outsider who is, moreover, not just an American but also a blood relative.

Clark is, strictly speaking, a cultural as well as biological hybrid, and his status as half-Japanese and half-American can perhaps be read as an allegory of the inextricably entwined fates of Japan and America in the postwar era. (Entirely left out of Kurosawa's and the Japanese characters' purviews is the ugly history of the United States government's internment of Japanese American citizens during the war.) Be this as it may, Clark's visit to the Japanese village and its inhabitants is nothing short of a dramatic entrance, the kind of fictional design that is aimed at or has the potential of bringing about something significant. What exactly is it? If Clark is a stand-in for "ethnic America," what does his brief appearance accomplish?

Clark's sojourn makes it impossible not to think of *Rhapsody in August* as a film about mourning. It is as though Kane's memory, which has hitherto been somewhat blurry (as she at first seems to have forgotten, or so she claims, even about her elder brother in Hawaii), is now—if I may use a term from film technology—re-mastered with Clark's entry. As her personal loss and suffering acquire the effects of a restored and enhanced film, which has reemerged in its full sensorial immediacy from the fog of old age and antiquated domestic existence, the act of recollection takes on the significance of an inimitable cinematic handling of the past. Yet even as the audience is, like her grandchildren, drawn sympathetically into the mournfulness of Kane's life, the knowledge of Japan's imperial aggression against its neighbors also looms. For a scholar of Chinese descent such as myself, the compassion Kurosawa so clearly bestows on the victims of Nagasaki is controverted by the film's silence on Japan's war crimes in China, Korea, and southeast Asia.¹⁰ In this respect, is not the film ironically a bit like *Tadao and Yoshie*, its most callous characters? What could be the rationale for its suppression of the past?

The ineluctability of this kind of antagonistic, rather than comfortable or harmonious, reaction among members of the film's audience is, I believe, exactly what lies at the core of Sakai's proposal of the heterolingual address: how to speak responsibly yet inclusively to the element of the genuinely foreign/alien in our midst? By extension, this question would have to involve not only the demographics of the audience (Japanese, American, Chinese, Korean, men, women, children, and so forth) but also what may come across as politically objectionable or "incorrect" language, as for instance the language of a film. In the case of a film about a survivor of the Nagasaki bombing, how are we to deal

with the existence and/or eruption of obviously irreconcilable perspectives, such as those stemming from Japanese nationalistic chauvinism, on the one hand, and, on the other, our knowledge of Japan's criminal imperialist behavior during the Second World War?

The ingenuity of Kurosawa's handling of this impasse may be glimpsed in several sets of speeches and exchanges within the diegesis. In an early scene, when the grandchildren suspect that Kane will not want to go to Hawaii because of the way her husband died, Kane clarifies that she does not particularly "like or dislike America" because of what happened, and that rather, "war is to blame." She reiterates this attitude toward war later, when she hears Yoshie scolding her son for writing that awkward telegram to the Hawaii relatives. Taking responsibility for the telegram, she lashes out:

"They claim they dropped the flash to stop war. It's already been forty-five years now. But the flash hasn't stopped war. They're still killing people! But you know... war is to blame. People do anything... just to win a war. Sooner or later, it will be the ruin of all of us."

Even in English translation, these simple words are striking in the manner they move from specificity to generality, through the semantic shifts introduced in the third-person plural pronoun, "they."¹¹ In its collective anonymity, "they" is provocative in this context precisely because it is ambiguous—and ambivalent. While the word does refer straightforwardly, at first, to Americans insofar as they were the ones who dropped the flash, the perspective of Kane's speech steadily broadens to become a criticism of anyone who supports fighting a war in order to be triumphant and supremacist: "They're still killing people!... People do anything... just to win a war." If the identifiable "they" returns us to a nameable other, Japan's national enemy who victimized innocent Japanese (and other) citizens, the anonymous "people" signals rather a general denunciation of war itself, whoever the instigator might be. To put it differently, if "they" remains (located in) the United States, Kane's statement can be interpreted as an anguished rejection of the national enemy, on the clearly set boundary between "us" and "them": since "they" killed "our" people, we must continue to condemn them. Mourning the dead, in this instance, would amount to a tribal ritual, one that insists on not forgetting one's own condition of being injured, and the attendant act of recollection would serve the purpose of reinstating that boundary between us and them so as to avenge those of our own who have been sacrificed. Once the notion of "they" is detached from a particular name to become simply "people," however, Kane's statements take on a decidedly different kind of connotation: all those who (like the Americans) provide justifications for the atomic attack (that it would not only end the war but also end war) are precisely those who will continue to wage war and kill people indefinitely. Instead of invoking a definitive boundary between us and them as adversaries based on national, cultural, or other types of identities, this alternative signification

problematizes war itself by pointing to the hypocrisy and delusion of its perpetrators (who always insist on giving war yet another chance).

The exchange that occurs between Kane and Clark as they sit under the moonlight outside her house is equally remarkable. Contrary to Tadao and Yoshie's fears, not only are Clark and his family not offended by the reminder of what happened in Nagasaki, but his father also immediately sent him for a visit so that he can do whatever he can to help his aunt. As he sits face to face with Kane, this is what they say to each other:

Clark: "I am terribly sorry for not knowing about Uncle. I'm really sorry."

Kane: "That's all right."

Clark: "You were born and live in Nagasaki. And still, we didn't realize it. That was wrong of us. We were wrong."

Kane: "That's all right."

In the same conversation, Kane says "That's all right" a third time, which is followed by "This is just fine." She then finishes by saying, in broken English, "Thank you very much," whereupon she reaches out to Clark and shakes hands with him. Again, Kurosawa has exploited these simple words to their full ambiguous capacity. Is Clark sorry because he and his family had no idea of what happened to Kane, or is he sorry for what the United States did to Japan? Did he come as a member of the extended family to offer an apology to his aunt—or did he come as a representative of the United States, to offer an apology to the Japanese?¹² Although I tend to agree with the view that there is nothing in Clark's words to suggest that he is delivering more than a personal apology to an elderly relative, the historical relations between Japan and the United States do make it difficult to dismiss the loaded symbolic dimensions of his deliverance.

Much more poignant than Clark's words, however, is Kane's response, "It's all right." Is she saying it's all right that the relatives in Hawaii did not think of what happened to her husband because they were preoccupied with their self-interests, or is she saying it's all right despite all her suffering, because no one in particular, not even an American citizen or a blood relative, can or should be held accountable for the casualties of that perpetual injunction, our love of war?

In Kane's gracious words, the identitarian politics of aggression, with neatly divided positions between aggressor and aggressed on the basis of national boundaries, has quietly unfolded (as a paper boat unfolds into the piece of paper which gives it its erstwhile shape, to paraphrase Walter Benjamin) into a universal refusal of war. (To borrow the words of Julia Kristeva, "Might not [such] universality be... our own foreignness?"¹³) This process of unfolding, staged through pure linguistic ambiguity, turns the ordinary speeches and exchanges in this film into examples of profound heterolinguality, wherein the lifelong sorrow of an elderly widow, speaking only Japanese and residing in the countryside, transforms itself into a sophisticatedly pacifist, cosmopolitan address. In this transformation, mourning becomes a forgiving and an embrace: even those who

have done one wrong are released from their guilt.

Perhaps this is the reason the film ends the way it does, with all the characters running after Kane in the torrential rain. In its intensity and harshness, the elements strike like an invincible enemy, against whom human resistance by means of a feeble umbrella seems laughable. Yet the film concludes not with the rain stopping or with the characters finding shelter. Instead, after showing various characters slipping and falling on their run, the film concludes when Kane's umbrella has so completely collapsed that it might as well be given up. As she persists by inching forward, her body drenched and exposed in the midst of the downpour, her fragile defense against nature's onslaught becoming utterly useless, the noise of the wind and rain is replaced by children's voices singing these lyrics in the Schubert song:

And the boy a rose did see, a rose standing in the field.
 Blooming in innocence,
 Awed by the color it did yield.
 A never-ending fascination
 For the crimson color
 of the rose standing in the field.¹⁴

Is Kane not precisely the bright red rose standing in the field (like the one seen by her little grandson and Clark outside the place of the memorial service for the atomic bomb victims), whose life force demonstrates that "defenses" are things that cannot and will not last?¹⁵

In his study of postwar world cinema, Gilles Deleuze writes that Kurosawa is a director whose films are not so much about arriving at meaningful actions in response to a given situation as about discovering large metaphysical questions deeply hidden therein. Deleuze also comments that in Kurosawa's stories, no flight tends to be possible.¹⁶ The way *Rhapsody in August* ends is certainly not a flight in the sense of an escape from the situation; at the same time it unsettles Deleuze's analysis, I think, by offering something rhapsodic. In the transcendence of war as allegorized by Kane—war, not simply in the sense of reciprocal hostility between warring parties but also in the sense of defensiveness, vengefulness, and self-aggrandizement against others—we find an aesthetic improvisation of a type of post-catastrophe authority and agency, which comes across much less in the form of action and assertion than in the form of release and letting go. In their de-monumentalization of memory and making-possible of forgiving, Kane's (speech) acts are no longer simply parts of a stubborn woman character's recollection of the past. Rather, they constitute and are enunciated filmically as the potentiality of a heterolingual address, in which we hear a different kind of "we" emerging, hailing a collective form of life that is yet to come.

Notes

1. Naoki Sakai, *Translation and Subjectivity: On "Japan" and Cultural Nationalism*, foreword by Meaghan Morris (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1997), 4; first emphasis mine, second emphasis his.
2. Sakai, *Translation and Subjectivity*, 9; my emphasis.
3. For an authoritative and informative discussion of the history and future potentials of American Studies as a field of study, see Donald E. Pease and Robyn Wiegman, "Futures," in *The Futures of American Studies*, ed. Donald E. Pease and Robyn Wiegman (Durham: Duke UP, 2002), 1-42.
4. William V. Spanos, "American Studies in the 'Age of the World Picture': Thinking the Question of Language," in *The Futures of American Studies*, 387, 400.
5. Spanos describes this situation as "the global colonization of thinking by American instrumentalism or rather by the Americanization of thinking, that sense of futility that comes over us when we realize that even our criticism of America must be carried out in—must be answerable to—the language of America, that sense, in other words, that we have been compelled into tacit, frustrating silence in the face of the triumph of a banal instrumental thinking that routinizes violence ("American Studies in the 'Age of the World Picture,'" 402).
6. See Rey Chow, "A Filmic Staging of Postwar Geotemporal Politics: Kurosawa Akira's *No Regrets for Our Youth*, Sixty Years Later," *boundary 2* 34.1 (Spring 2007): 67-77. Some passages in this lecture are adopted in modified form from this earlier essay.
7. Kyoko Hirano, *Mr. Smith Goes to Tokyo: Japanese Cinema under the American Occupation, 1945-1952* (Washington and London: Smithsonian Institute, 1992), 54; my emphasis.
8. As a parallel, in Western scholarship on Japanese film, critics are fond of finding essentialist principles (such as the samurai code of honor, the warrior ideal, the Zen sensibility for harmony with nature, etc.) in modern Japanese scenarios in order to argue the continuity of a Japanese cultural heritage. See Mitsuhiro Yoshimoto, *Kurosawa: Film Studies and Japanese Cinema* (Durham: Duke UP, 2000), 71-74 and throughout.
9. Cited in Donald Richie, *The Films of Akira Kurosawa*, 3rd ed. (Berkeley: U of California P, 1998), 40.
10. For a discussion of the critical controversy surrounding the film's seeming dehistoricization of the events that had led up to the dropping of the atomic bombs, see Yoshimoto, *Kurosawa*, 364-71. As Yoshimoto writes, "The reception of *Rhapsody in August* (Hachigatsu no rapusodi [kyoshikyoku, 1991] has been predominantly negative and more important, politically charged" (365).
11. My thanks to Yuriko Furuhashi for assistance with comparing the English translation with the Japanese dialogue.
12. See Yoshimoto's discussion of the ambiguity of Clark's apology in *Kurosawa*, 367-68. Yoshimoto's own reading, which sees the apology as one offered within the extended family between Japan and Hawaii, is as follows: "As ambiguous as his broken Japanese is, Clark clearly speaks as an extended family member, not as an American. He admits his family's and his own failure to realize what kind of pain the grandmother has been suffering from her husband's death by the atomic blast. They didn't make a connection between the

death of Kane's husband and the location of her home, Nagasaki. Instead, they talked only about themselves without paying attention to Kane's circumstances. By urging her to come to Hawaii as soon as possible, they were even unintentionally asking her to miss the anniversary of the Nagasaki bombing and memorial services for her dead husband... This is the reason why Clark apologizes to Kane; it is not at all the case that he apologizes for the American attack on Nagasaki with the atomic bomb" (368).

13. See Julia Kristeva, *Strangers to Ourselves*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia UP, 1991), chapter 8 (168-92). The question is the title of the chapter.
14. The lyrics are quite different from the words in Goethe's poem. Kurosawa's remarks about his use of music in filmmaking are interesting to note here: "from *Drunken Angel* onward, I have used light music for some key sad scenes, and my way of using music has differed from the norm—I don't put it in where most people do. Working with Hayasaka [Fumio], I began to think in terms of the counterpoint of sound and image as opposed to the union of sound and image." Akira Kurosawa, *Something Like an Autobiography*, trans. Audie E. Bock (New York: Vintage, 1983), 197.
15. For a different reading that sees Kane as a brave warrior and the dysfunctional umbrella as becoming like a rose, see Yoshimoto, *Kurosawa*, 370-71.
16. See Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1986), 188-92; reprinted in *Perspectives on Akira Kurosawa*, ed. James Goodwin (New York: G. K. Hall & Co., 1994), 246-50.