

Abe Kōbō, Translation, Philosophy

Richard CALICHMAN

In this paper I focus on the writer Abe Kōbō in relation to such philosophical concepts as time, space, and translation. What does it mean to bring together the discourses of literature and philosophy? I'd like to suggest that this act of joining literature and philosophy is not to be understood primarily in biographical terms. That is, a philosophical reading of Abe cannot be grounded in the fact that Abe was himself conversant in philosophical discourse, having spent his formative years studying such thinkers as Nietzsche and Heidegger. For this would suggest that those writers with no background in philosophy might be excluded from philosophical interpretation, and this I believe would be a mistake. Insofar as literature is a linguistic art, it from the beginning offers itself to philosophical analysis. The joining of these two discourses allows us to consider various literary elements with more rigor and precision, enabling us to gain a measure of distance from established ways of seeing the world and think things afresh. In my talk today, I'd like to first draw attention to the problem of translation and consider how Abe attempts to think this notion differently. For Abe, the conventional understanding of translation presupposes the existence of fixed linguistic borders, and these borders are often linked to such geopolitical entities as the nation-state and thus to such implicit notions as race and ethnicity. Abe criticizes this notion of borders as excessively spatial—that is to say, as insufficiently temporal. It is for this reason that any examination of Abe's thinking of translation must also include reflection on his ideas about time and space.

I'll begin with a brief reference to Abe's celebrated novel of 1962, *Suna no onna*, before following a 1977 dialogue on translation between Abe and the pioneer of US Japan Studies, Donald Keene. I'll then discuss the notion of time in Abe's 1984 novel *Hakobune sakura maru*, and this will lead me to a more extended consideration of the time-space relation as found in his 1968 essay "Uchinaru henkyō."

The very opening exchange in *Suna no onna* can be broadly understood as a lesson in translation.

「なんの話だか、よく分からないが……ぼくは、ほら、昆虫採集をしているんですよ。こういう、砂地の虫が、ぼくの専門でね。」

「なんだって？」

どうやら相手にはうまく飲み込めなかったらしい。

「昆、虫、採、集！」と、もう一度大声でくりかえし、「虫ですよ、虫！……こうして、虫を捕るんだよ！」⁽¹⁾

In this famous passage, the protagonist of the novel is wandering across the sands in search of insects when he is suddenly approached by a local villager. The villager asks if the protagonist is conducting an inspection, and the protagonist replies that he is actually collecting insects. The villager doesn't appear to understand this expression 昆虫採集, and the protagonist is forced to translate into easier language: 「虫ですよ、虫！こうして、虫を捕るんだよ！」 Various things are happening in this scene, but for my purposes I wish to simply draw attention to this translation of 昆虫採集 as 虫を捕る. Two quick points: 1. This translation is to some degree a mistranslation since the act of collecting (採集) is not the same thing as catching (捕る); and 2. This possibility of mistranslation takes place

(1) Abe Kōbō zenshū (Tokyo: Shinchosha, 1997-2000), v.16, p.125.

because the interiority of the Japanese language is already divided from itself. That is to say, the border between languages that makes translation possible doesn't simply exist between two languages that are foreign to one another. On the contrary, the foreign can be found within the borders of the "native" language itself. It is for this reason that the notion of translation must be generalized, for the border between interiority and exteriority, native and foreign, can be found inside all languages, thereby corrupting the alleged integrity or purity of any one language itself.

In his dialogue with Donald Keene entitled "Nihongo, nihon bungaku, nihonjin," Abe points to the gradual weakening of the nation-state system in terms of literature in translation, or *honyaku bungaku*. As he states:

日本人の場合、若い人が成長の過程で、翻訳文学を契機に文学への目を開いてゆくというケースがきわめて多い。文学への目は日本固有のものから固有に出発し、固有のプロセスで成長していくわけではない。In Japan, there are a great many cases where young people growing up first open their eyes to literature through reading literature in translation. This awakening to literature does not take place as a process of propriety in which one makes one's proper departure on the basis of works that are properly Japanese.⁽²⁾

The word Abe strategically repeats here is *koyū*, which can also be translated as "unique," "particular," "inherent," or "intrinsic." Translation, he contends, must be thought as in some sense a violation of the proper, and above all the nationally proper. Abe declares that this violation of national propriety must be understood in its barest form as a question of bracketing. As he states:

現代はもう日本の固有性をはるかに超えており、地球の上の人間という問題はすでに日本というカッコの中で考えられない。(中略) 言葉で構築した世界はそれが何語で書かれていようと言語の特殊性にたよらなくなる。

Today we have far exceeded any sense of Japanese propriety, and the question of people on this earth can no longer be conceived within the brackets of Japan... A world structured by language no longer depends upon linguistic particularity, regardless of the language in which works are written.⁽³⁾

Abe's considerable interest in translation is emphasized by Keene, who regards Abe's reading of translated works as crucial to his development as a writer. As Keene states:

The people for whom Abe had the highest esteem were neither novelists nor scholars, but rather translators. Thanks to Japan's brilliant translators, Abe, who was utterly unable to read foreign languages, read widely in world literature and received inspiration from it. Abe was able to become an international writer by his reading of these translated works.⁽⁴⁾

Keene grasped the biographical fact of Abe's indebtedness to literary translation, but he also understood more generally the implicit threat that translation often poses to conceptions of national propriety. As he tells Abe at one point,

When your novels are translated, there are of course many foreigners who are impressed. But there are also those who complain, 'His works are insufficiently Japanese.' Let me provide a more concrete example. The other day Mishima Yukio's play *Madame de Sade* had a trial run in New York. Upon reading the reviews, I noticed that most critics wrote things like, 'It is bizarre that a Japanese person would write a story about eighteenth century France. The fact that this play is staged through an American's translation makes it even more bizarre.' However, I didn't particularly feel upon reading the work that, rather than it being something that

(2) Abe Kōbō zenshū, v.25, pp. 474-475.

(3) Ibid., p.477.

(4) D. Keene, "Honmono no tensai: Abe Kōbō" in *Chuō kōron*, April 1993.

could only be written by a Japanese, it was something that only a French person could write.⁽⁵⁾

Keene recognizes that the reviewers of Mishima's play, together with certain readers of Abe's fiction, are motivated by the national-culturalist desire that Japanese works as composed by Japanese writers present themes that can recognizably be framed as particular Japanese phenomena. Such desire carries within it a prescriptive force that states, in effect, "You must be Japanese!" Here the general category of Japan is not simply or immediately one; rather, it is internally differentiated and mediated, containing within it the various aspects of authorship, language, and artistic subject matter. In order for a work to be purely Japanese, it must be written by a Japanese writer in the Japanese language and focus on Japanese themes. This implicit set of criteria helps explain the not infrequent response of puzzlement or disappointment to Abe's fiction for the reason that, as Keene reports, "His works are insufficiently Japanese." Keene is correct to call attention to this issue, but in doing so he indirectly raises the following question: if the category of Japan is to be problematized and the assumptions of national-culturalism exposed, would it not also be possible to see the institution of Japanese literary studies as governed by this same framework? No doubt a distinction must be made between Mishima's reviewers and scholars of Japanese literature in that the latter do not require that the subject matter for Japanese literature be restricted to what appears to be specifically Japanese phenomena. However, this difference merely underscores the fact that both camps would largely agree on the issues of Japanese authorship and language. In order for a textual object to be considered "proper" or internal to the study of Japanese literature, it must generally be determined to be written by a Japanese writer in the medium of the Japanese language. In this sense, Keene's remark concerning the reception of Abe and Mishima can be read as unintentionally highlighting a much more fundamental problem that haunts the institution of Japan Studies as such.

Keene is forced to abandon this line of thinking insofar as it threatens to expose the contingency with which all determinations of Japan are made. As goes without saying, the question of who is Japanese and who is not, together with the question of what properly belongs within the Japanese language and what does not, are in no way natural or immediately given. On the contrary, the history of these determinations itself forms a tradition. When we encounter these determinations in the present, we recognize that they come from the past and are given to us to be remarked now, at every instant, so that they can in turn be released into the future for other determinations that will either confirm or alter them. In point of fact, this understanding of the essentially differential and temporal nature of determination can be seen in Abe's discussion of translation in his emphatic repetition of the word "proper." To quote once again: 「文学への目は日本固有のものから固有に出発し、固有のプロセスで成長していくわけではない。」 "This awakening to literature does not take place as a process of propriety (*koyū no puroseseu*) in which one makes one's proper departure (*koyū ni shuppatsu shi*) on the basis of works that are properly Japanese (*nihon koyū no mono*)."

For Abe, translation is to be conceived as a violation of the proper, exposing the fallibility of any "bracketing" or framing of what otherwise appears to be the discrete unit of the nation-state and its system of national language. The question is, then, how are we to understand this violation of the proper in its relation to repetition? In this context, it should be noted that Abe's choice of the particular word to be repeated is in no way fortuitous. What is "proper" to something is what serves to distinguish its inside from its outside, thereby establishing its own identity and self-presence vis-à-vis other things that are seen to be different from it. Abe attempts to trouble this logic of identity, precisely, by *repeating* the proper: if this notion names the pure self-identity of something, then what happens to that identity when this something is repeated in such a way as to create different instances of itself? If the word *koyū* is self-identical, then is the border that demarcates identity and difference, inside and outside, to be drawn around all instances of its appearance or strictly around each instance? If the former, then propriety reveals itself to be internally differentiated and thus no longer self-identical in any pure or absolute sense. If the latter, however, then the very notion of propriety comes to be invalidated since it is now no longer possible to determine which instance of *koyū* is proper and which is not.

(5) D. Keene, *Hangekiteki ningen*, (Tokyo: Chuō kōron shinsha, 1973), p.24.

In order for any word to signify, it must be able to repeat itself *as* itself over the course of its differential inscriptions in time and space. If the word *koyū* appeared only once, it would be impossible to remark it as identical to itself, with the result that meaning would immediately collapse into chaos. In order for this word to be meaningful at all, it must necessarily contain within itself traces of its differential inscriptions in other times and other spaces. In this way, the identity of meaning can be said to already presuppose a repetition in or through difference. Abe's unusual example of *koyū*, *koyū*, *koyū* helps us understand that propriety can only be achieved as a delayed effect, that difference cannot simply exist outside the proper but is in fact constitutive of its very identity. Let me stress that this discovery of impropriety, or alterity, within the heart of the proper stands as one of Abe's most powerful insights and can be seen to inform a great deal of his work. He at one point refers to this impossibility of propriety as the "structure of heterogeneity," or *hetero no kōzō*, something that incapacitates every attempt on the part of purity to achieve itself through what he calls the "elimination of inferior elements." As Abe's example of repetition incisively demonstrates, the organization of propriety and impropriety, interiority and exteriority, as grounded on the principle of identity and difference must posit an original unity existing within the unit or entity itself. This is of course what establishes its difference from other entities. By showing that any unit is already forced to traverse or expose itself to difference in order to be recognized as the same unit, Abe sheds light on the essential failure of all propriety.

In cases where translation is viewed as transgressive, in either a positive or negative sense, the nature of this transgression is frequently misunderstood insofar as the disturbance of the proper is seen to take place at the moment in which the unity of one national language is confronted with the difference of another. In order to avoid this misunderstanding, it is crucial to grasp the full extent of the insight afforded by Abe's example of differential repetition. As I've argued, the repetition of any element in its identity is grounded in its prior inscriptive exposure to difference. What this means, precisely, is that the operation of transgression does *not* take place at the level of the unit. The logic of transgression, or repetition in difference, is originary, which is to say that it always already undermines any thinking based on the unity of the unit. In this account, difference can no longer be understood derivatively as something that befalls a prior instance of identity. As Abe realized, such determination could typically be found at the root of various proprietary conceptions of the social, which project in the register of fantasy a moment of original communal unity that is only subsequently destroyed by the incursion of difference. We see here, however, that the passage from identity to difference can occur at all only because that identity is already divided by difference, that it is already late in arriving at itself. It is because of this originary exposure to difference that translation must now be more radically conceived, for the unity of a national language is for structural reasons internally disturbed, not quite itself, even before it encounters the difference of another national language. In concrete terms, the translation of any word or phrase from one's native language into a foreign language presupposes that it has already been rendered foreign to itself in order to acquire signification in that native language. Translation, then, even prior to referring to the transition between one national language and another, can be said to name this originary moment of self-alteration.

Let me now turn to the notion of time as it appears in Abe's novel *Hakobune sakura maru*. This work introduces a strange insect called the eupcaccia, which is also known as *tokeimushi*, meaning "clockbug." This insect lives by ingesting its own feces. Its legs have gradually atrophied to the point of disappearance because of this unique capacity—it has no need to travel in search of food—thus restricting its movements to a perfect circle. Pivoting on its abdomen, the eupcaccia moves in slow, more or less constant rotation, receiving what it gives itself in the repeated cycle of consumption and elimination. This circular movement, combined with the fact that the insect sleeps with its head facing the sun, explains the origin of its name as well as the reason why it is used as an instrument to measure time by the people of Epicham Island, its native habitat.

The eupcaccia holds particular fascination for the novel's protagonist, who regards the insect as the perfect symbol of his ideal of self-containment or self-sufficiency (*jikyū jisoku*). Such ideal is cherished by the protagonist because of his conviction of the imminence of nuclear war, in preparation for which he has transformed an underground quarry into a type of ark capable of sustaining life. Living alone within the ark in virtual isolation from the outside world, this character is highly reluctant to recruit others for his crew despite his recognition of the necessity of communal existence if mankind is to survive the apocalypse. This desire for absolute autonomy is manifested in

the work as spatial and temporal fixity. Spatially, the protagonist has succeeded in eliminating nearly every need to go beyond the parameters of his own self-enclosure. Temporally, he is determined to await the apocalypse, a term that has traditionally signified the destruction of all temporal phenomena in the emergence of the atemporal truth of revelation. This notion of timelessness refers back to the eupcaccia, whose use as a measurement of time is clearly intended ironically by Abe given that the insect's pure self-sufficiency appears to safeguard it from all temporal alterity.

In the self's giving of itself to itself in the instance of self-sufficiency, no time appears to intervene that would effectively differentiate the self from itself, thereby creating not one but rather a multiplicity of selves, each imperfectly identical to the other. Abe appears to conceive of this state of timelessness in terms of a static spatiality: in the novel, the eupcaccia's particular biology relieves it of the need to encounter anything outside itself, thereby creating a cycle or circle of repetition in which self-relation occurs interminably without the least infraction of difference. Here the subordination of time to spatial stability or immobility is determined as an elimination of alterity in favor of a unified selfsameness. In the case of the eupcaccia, any exteriority discovered is strictly that which is produced by the self, and this exteriority is moreover immediately internalized in the act of consumption.

Abe further develops his thinking of time and space in the essay "Uchinaru henkyō." At the end of this work, which focuses on the relation between the city and the nation-state, he seems to determine time as a medium that exists against or in some sense in opposition to space. As he writes:

かつて、外からの移動民族の襲来が、農耕国家の空間的固有性を破壊して、国境を超えた同時代感覚を持ち込み、定着にともなう停滞に新しい跳躍の機会を与えてくれたように、今度は都市という内部の辺境から、国境を破壊する軍勢が立ち現れようとしているのかもしれない。農村的な特殊性に「正統」を認める、国家の思想にかわって、都市的な同時代性に「正統」を認める、辺境派の軍勢が……

Just as the foreign invasion of migrant ethnic groups once destroyed the spatial identity of the agrarian state, introducing a *sense of contemporaneity* beyond national borders and providing a new opportunity to leap beyond the stagnation that accompanies fixity, so too might troops intent on destroying national borders now appear from the internal frontier of cities. The state ideology that recognized 'legitimacy' in the particularity of farming villages might then be replaced by frontier troops who recognize 'legitimacy' in the contemporaneity of cities.⁽⁶⁾

In this passage, Abe attempts to explain the threat posed to the nation-state in modernity by the formation of the city as contained within the nation's own borders. In the past, he contends, states privileged farming villages over cities, seeing these villages as the embodiment of a natural attachment to the land in contrast to the city's corruption and artificiality, which came about as a direct consequence of the severing of this relation to the land. It was because of the farmer's close ties to nature that they were granted the seal of legitimacy by the state, which meant in concrete terms that they were regarded as the state's most true or rightful representatives. A variety of material advantages ensued from this determination, and these came at a cost to the inhabitants of cities, whose corresponding disadvantages in society went hand in hand with the state's branding of them as illegitimate or secondary citizens. What astonishes Abe is the fact that the state, despite the enormously productive growth of cities, continues in its ideological pronouncements to value the rural for its sense of immediate community and condemn the urban for its alienating, disruptive influence.

At issue, then, is a certain reversal that Abe sees in the relation between the nation-state and city. States previously made use of cities as external frontiers, in Abe's language, meaning sites that belonged only tangentially to the state and which were occupied by undesirable types of citizens. Upon the state's recognition of the great profit to be made in consolidating urban areas, however, it came to appropriate these latter for itself, thereby ensuring that the negativity released in the increasing abstraction or mediation of society was utilized for national ends—ultimately

(6) Abe Kōbō zenshū, v.22, p.227. English translation is taken from R. Calichman, *The Frontier Within: Essays by Abe Kōbō* (New York: Columbia University Press), p.148.

strengthening rather than weakening the state's totality. Abe's aim here is to question the limits of this appropriation. If the state concentrates its resources in the city while nevertheless denouncing the city for its illegitimacy, then what is the fate of this contradiction? Abe envisions present-day resistance on the part of urban elements to take a form similar to that found in the past in the tension between the agrarian state and migrant ethnic groups. Just as the latter succeeded in destroying the borders insulating the state from its outside, so too might the forces of the city now accomplish this same task in exceeding the determined parameters that the nation has claimed for itself.

For Abe, the present-day forces of the city have inherited a certain legacy of violence from the migrant ethnic groups of the past. This legacy binds these two entities together, but Abe takes care to underline an important difference between them: whereas the migrant groups attacked or invaded from the outside, the "troops" of the city would now appear from within. As should be clear, such violence on the part of these groups does not emerge spontaneously or unilaterally. The very fact that the agrarian state of the past erected borders testifies to its forced exclusion of those elements that, in a strange temporality, nevertheless came to be determined as foreign only through the establishment of these boundaries. In other words, this identification of an exteriority allowed the state to gather itself in its newfound unity and selfsameness. According to Abe, the state's past violence of exclusion changed over time to take the specific form of assimilation, with the result that the originally external frontier of cities has now gradually come to be nearly fully absorbed within the nation-state's very center. In this way, Abe carefully charts the organization of different types of alterity as seen from the perspective of the state. In the past, the other to the state was identified as migrant ethnic groups; thereafter the state marginalized cities and their inhabitants to the outer frontier, located at the border between its own inside and outside; finally, the state's recognition of the vast economic potential of cities in the emerging money economy necessitated that such urban alterity be centralized, thereby domesticating it. In this redetermination of the city as an appropriated "frontier within," or *uchinaru henkyō*, Abe attempts to discover whether the alterity of the frontier can be said to still remain or whether it has been completely effaced.

We can see in this passage the manner in which Abe mobilizes a series of oppositions in order to account for the changing relations between the nation-state and city. The past is set forth against the present, the farming village against the city, and relatedly the incipient modernity of the agricultural state against the advanced modernity of the capitalist state. With this transition, the state reinforces its sovereignty by shifting focus from the violent exclusion of outside elements to the no less violent inclusion or assimilation of internal elements. Significantly, this change involves a radical displacement of space by time: the state's "spatial identity" as appears in the presence of national borders was previously destroyed by the invasion of migrant groups, who thereby opened the state to its outside. This opening, Abe emphasizes, took the form of a "sense of contemporaneity" that vastly exceeded the establishment of determinate borders. Such borders create a false or derivative opposition between inside and outside that depends on the principle of "particularity." Abe fully recognizes the force of particularism in the continued presence of discrete, individual states, but he suggests that a more powerful force exists that has the capacity to destroy it. This more universal force that is capable of dissolving the identity of spatial particularity is that of time.

Abe's understanding of time is more allusive than straightforward, but it seems clear that he views time in positive terms as a threat to "spatial identity," as he calls it. In his companion essay "Zoku, *uchinaru henkyō*," Abe refers suggestively to the notion of time as part of his critique of the spatiality of the state. As he writes:

われわれがいまおかれている社会、現状、現在、これはなにかという問いを發した時に、われわれがつい日常性というもの、つまり昨日のように今日があり、今日のように明日がある、そういう連続体を、たとえばひとつの共同体のなかにいる安心感のようなものを、だんだんと延長して、けっきょく最後は、国家というひとつの枠のなかに入っていく。そこには、なにか今まで、たとえば郷土であるとか家であるとか、そういうような枠は自然に壊れて、組織化されていくということに誰でも慣れてしまったけれども、国家という枠にぶつかって、それは家庭であるとか郷土であるとか（中略）そういう枠組とは質の違う、次元の違うものではないか

When we inquire into the nature of our society, status quo (*genjō*) and present (*genzai*), we begin to see that a sense of security of everydayness (in which today appears like yesterday and tomorrow appears like today), as

for example the sense of security one feels in a community, pervades us. We then gradually extend the continuum of everydayness until we finally enter the framework of the state. Everyone has now grown used to the fact that such frameworks as the native hometown or household come naturally to be destroyed and reorganized. Upon encountering the state, however, the particular sense or perception one has is that it possesses a different level or character...⁽⁷⁾

“Everydayness” is a “continuum,” as Abe calls it; it is that which provides a sense of security or stability that one’s belonging within a given community is assured. Abe here attacks the framework of the state, but he points out that this framework bears commonalities with such other collective entities as, for example, the native hometown and household. It is in order to illustrate what he means by the notion of everydayness that Abe refers to one’s quotidian perception of time as continuity: “today appears like yesterday and tomorrow appears like today” (*kinō no yō ni kyō ga ari, kyō no yō ni ashita ga aru*). This sense of continuity, he claims, informs not only our affiliation with the various institutions that constitute social existence; it also grounds our understanding of the status quo or present situation and indeed of the very present itself. This is so because the present is divided from within. This internal differentiation takes three forms, which Abe describes in terms of the unit of the day: past (“yesterday”), present (“today”), and future (“tomorrow”).

Time is thus not simply one, for its self-division causes it to appear in some sense multiply. The question Abe seems to pose concerns the relation of these different forms of time to one another. Temporal continuity is achieved if these forms are regarded on the basis of identity: despite the fact that past, present, and future are not immediately equivalent to one another—if they were, there could be no movement of time at all—they are nevertheless *like* (*no yō ni*) each other. The present can be comprehended in terms of the past, just as the future can be grasped in terms of the present. What allows this thinking of succession to support the sense of security one feels in everydayness is the fixed position these temporal forms seem to occupy vis-à-vis one another. Given that the phenomenon in question is the self-differentiating movement of time, however, how is it possible that such movement can lead to what Abe considers to be the false stability of communal existence? The contradiction that Abe discloses springs from his insight that temporal succession must be thought more radically, such as to unsettle any simple division of time into fixed, self-identical units.

The concept of everydayness, in its status as the foundation of present existence in all its apparent constancy and solidity, exercises a kind of violence upon time. Despite the fact that time is shown to be constantly differing from itself in its passage from past to present to future, the very conception of these individual forms *as such* presupposes a notion of temporality that is antithetical to that movement of self-differentiation. What enables this conception is a thinking of time that implicitly privileges the present. That is to say, both the past and future are characterized by absence, for the past is no longer and the future is not yet; hence only the present appears capable of giving itself in all its fullness and immediacy to be thought. However, the recognition that the present exists as embedded within a succession of other temporal forms that exceed and in some sense condition it necessitates that these latter also be taken into account. This is achieved by recognizing past and future as mere modifications of the present: in this determination, the past comes to be remarked as the past present and the future as the future present. The shared presence of the present in all three temporal forms is what guarantees the possibility for time to be determined as a continuum. Time differs from itself, but this difference appears to be grounded upon the identity of a present that exists now, did exist previously, and will exist again.

It is in order to think time beyond its determination as continuum that Abe is forced to appeal to the notion of alterity. What he earlier referred to in “Uchinaru henkyō” as a “sense of contemporaneity” is in “Zoku, uchinaru henkyō” more fully elaborated as a “shared sensibility with the other,” or *tasha to no kyōyū kankaku*:

ですから他者との共有感覚というと、非常に抽象的な言い回しですけども、最初の文体、つまり時代の構造というか、それが空間の時代から、時間を軸にした時代へ移行していったことによって、われわれは

(7) Abe Kōbō zenshū, v.22, pp.325-6. English translation is taken from *The Frontier Within*, p.151.

時代という共有感覚をもつようになった。

Although the expression ‘shared sensibility with the other’ sounds very abstract, it means that we have come to possess a shared sensibility of the age by shifting away from an age of space to one that is shaped by time.⁽⁸⁾

Time, then, when linked to the notion of alterity seems to in some sense disturb the yielding to identity and spatiality that is required in order for time to be determined as continuum. The obliqueness of Abe’s language here resists any simple explanation, but we can certainly find examples in his fiction where he seeks to actively challenge traditional notions of temporal succession. In for example the 1973 novel *Hako otoko*, Abe’s narrator writes the following: 「どうやら君は、まだなに一つ始まっていない、明後日のことを、すでに過去の事件として記録しはじめる気らしい。」 “You evidently fancy to begin recording the past events of the day after tomorrow when nothing has yet occurred.”⁽⁹⁾ Time appears even further disjointed in the final lines of the 1977 novel *Mikkai*: 「いくら認めないつもりでも、明日の新聞に先を越され、ぼくは明日という過去の中で、何度も確実に死につづける。」 “However much I may resent the fact, ‘tomorrow’s newspaper’ has gone ahead of me and scooped me; and so, in the past called tomorrow, over and over I continue certainly to die.”⁽¹⁰⁾

When temporal succession is conceived in terms of everydayness, the spatial identity that Abe associates with the establishment of fixed borders and particular forms of community seems to emerge. When temporal succession is thought on the basis of alterity, however, the underlying presence of the present that grounds the fixed continuum of past, present and future appears to suffer disturbance. The immediate presence of the present, which traditionally privileges it over the absence of both the past and future, provides the requisite stability for temporal succession to take place as an ordered movement between the fixed points of the past, present, and future now. In Abe’s fictional descriptions of time, however, this privileging of the present seems to be quite forcefully displaced. In its stead we find a movement of alteration in which past and future freely drift from the fixity of their positions so as to relate to one another in surprising, unsettling ways. What releases this strange movement of time is the fact that the present proves incapable of fully governing the succession of nows between past, present, and future. Once unmoored from their fixity in the present, the past and future in their inherent alterity come to exceed their modification as mere past present and future present. In this way, a movement is created in which the present begins to be pulled away from itself.

Abe seems to gesture toward this movement in the passage already quoted from “Zoku, uchinaru henkyō.” Let us recall that the classical notion of temporal succession that he condemns (in which “today appears like yesterday and tomorrow appears like today”) emerges as part of his attempt to grasp the nature of the present, which he emphasizes through use of the words *genjō* and *genzai*. The very presence of the present is disclosed in this shared character *gen* (or *arawareru*), which means “to appear” or “to become visible.” This presence, as I’ve suggested, is contrasted to the quality of absence that characterizes both past and future, since the former is already gone and the latter has not yet arrived. Given that the movement of temporal succession requires absence as well as presence, the question becomes one in which the precise relation between these two elements comes to the fore. Although the present depends upon the past in order to *become what it is* while also depending upon the future so as to determine at the level of retroactivity what it *will have been*, this indebtedness to what is other than itself comes to be concealed. As such, the present in its immediate visibility or positivity can be found to repress those absent forms of time that it nevertheless requires in order to be itself. In Abe’s example of temporal succession, “today” can be described as “like yesterday” and “tomorrow” “like today” strictly on the condition that the presence of today is secretly allowed to fill the absence of yesterday and tomorrow. However, this operation violates what Abe attempts to think as the more originary time of alterity by effacing both the non-present pastness of yesterday and the non-present futurity of tomorrow.

(8) Abe Kōbō zenshū, v.22, p.343. English translation is from *The Frontier Within*, p.168.

(9) Abe Kōbō zenshū, v. 24, p.93. English translation is from trans. E. Dale Saunders, *The Box Man* (New York: Vintage Books, 1974) p.117.

(10) Abe Kōbō zenshū, v.26, p.140. English translation is from trans. Juliet Winters Carpenter, *Secret Rendezvous* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979) p.179. Translation is slightly modified.

In Abe's text, this appropriation of the time of alterity by the everyday conception of time as continuum is also represented as the subordination of time to space. What this means is that the fundamental notion of the presence of the present, which holds together the identity of temporal succession in reducing the negative absence of past and future to mere instances of a full present that previously was and again will be, must be understood as a derivative spatialization of time. We have already encountered this critique of space in favor of time in the context of "Zoku, uchinaru henkyō" in what Abe called a "shifting away from an age of space to one that is shaped by time." Similar expressions can be found throughout his work, as for example in the 1949 essay "Bungaku to jikan": 「文学とは、そのように固有な時間を、平均化された或いは空間化された時間によることなしに（中略）表現することで固有な感動形式をもつのである。」 "Literature comes to possess its own proper emotional form by expressing the time that is proper to it, without averaging out or spatializing time."⁽¹¹⁾ And again in the 1959 novel *Dai yon kanpyōki*: 「ウェルズのタイム・マシーンが幼稚だったのは、時間旅行などと言いながら、けっきょく時間の推移を、空間的に翻訳してしか捉え得なかったところにある。」 "H.G. Well's Time Machine was after all child's play, for he could only grasp the transition of time by translating it spatially, although he spoke of traveling *in* time."⁽¹²⁾ In the particular language of this latter passage, the spatialization of time is for Abe less a "translation" than a mistranslation insofar as it claims to present that which by its nature exceeds the scope of all presentation. If on the contrary the "transition of time" were to be translated *temporally*, then such privileging of the present would be forced not to disavow but rather to recognize and rigorously take into account this excess.

By way of conclusion, let me emphasize that the question of translation is ultimately a question of borders. In its most fundamental form, these borders are not drawn from anything empirical that might attest to the essential unity of one language in its difference from another. Here the conventional understanding of translation reveals its limitations, limitations that are typically concealed by the subjective desire for identity and affiliation. It is precisely to contest these desires that form such a central role in knowledge production that the discipline of literature must be treated in more philosophical terms. Abe Kōbō powerfully understood this insight. If we are to consider translation as a relation between languages, then we must first recognize that language is a thing in the world and is thus dependent upon time and space as its organizing principles. But since time is now thought beyond its fixity in the present, a more general and disturbing conception of translation comes into view.

*** The original manuscript was presented as the keynote address at the International Symposium "Literary Translation in Conversation with Academic Research" March 22, 2023 at the Waseda International House of Literature.

(11) Abe Kōbō zenshū, v. 2, p.289.

(12) Abe Kōbō zenshū, v. 9, p.12. English translation is from trans. E. Dale Saunders, *Inter Ice Age 4* (New York: Berkley Medallion Books, 1970), p. 12.