One of the recent fruits of the so-called science studies is the fact that researchers have realized the fundamental importance of small practices, scientific tools and various gadgets in mundane, everyday activities of laboratories for the production of scientific knowledge, aside from the theoretical aspects of science. Now this success seems to have been extended to form the very leitmotif of this exhibition, employing not grand theories but things, tools and apparatuses in different domains of society as a means of discovering clues for solving the problem of what is generally called the crisis of representation.

Yet rather than being cajoled by hypnotic rhetoric to set foot in this irresistible exhibition, I confess I have almost stumbled, not over the things that are planned to appear in the show but over the concepts and rhetoric that form its background. The following sketch is an attempt to anatomize what kind of invisible stone was put just at the entrance, which, just like the malicious and absurd gatekeeper in Kafka’s novel, keeps me away from the party inside.

Between the structuralistic dichotomy appearing in this show – grand theories, which are mainly textual, and small tools and materials, which are concrete and visible things – there are things that I am going to highlight that seem almost inconsequential yet in fact are far from being insignificant: literary tricks such as puns, etymologies and conceptual analyses. For instance, the etymological exegesis of the word thing plays a role of pivotal importance, which is to be extended to coin a basic distinction between object out there and thing in dispute as the leitmotif of the show.

Another conspicuous example is the use of the term representation. The whole argument starts from taking for granted the idea of the crisis of representation, and then it proceeds to seek the solution by reference to the practical details of tools and materials. Although the possibility of the sweeping theoretical solutions to the crisis of representation has been rightly questioned, the very idea of the crisis of representation has not. The argument, then, develops in line with the conceptual ramifications of the term representation in various domains like politics, law, artificial intelligence (AI) and so on.

Now here is the stumbling block that I have mentioned: These rhetorical devices, such as etymology and conceptual analysis, take their full effect only if you share with the audience the same linguistic heritage, whether it be the Old German language or the imperial Latin. The rhetoric may touch the heart of the descendants of these tribal ancestors or the vanished empire. But the trouble is that if these are translated into non-European languages, the aura of the rhetoric evaporates ephemerally, and people start to wonder what actually is at stake here.

Between these two rhetorical devices shown above, thing-etymology is an easier case, as this is a conventional rhetorical technique newly applied to the word thing to impress the audience about the different aspects of things. This kind of etymo-philosophical display is not unusual in many of the well-known philosophical texts, but it is also possible to play with words in other languages, too. The rhetorical effects produced by it, however, would be quite different.

For instance, the ordinary Japanese equivalent of thing is mono, which is an ancient term just like its counterpart, but its historical ramifications of meaning are quite different. Originally mono meant not only an object with shape but everything whose existence we can perceive. So mono also extends to spiritual, godly existence, as in mono-noke (spirit). Hayao Miyazaki’s Princess Mononoke is an example. And mono is also
Nobuo Sekine, *tsō-Daichi* [Phase-Mother Earth], 1968, installation, © Nobuo Sekine, photo: Osamu Murai. A de facto manifesto for the *Mono-ha* [School of Things].
closely related to speech. So the boundary of **mono** is vague and extendable to supernaturals and to speech; thus the boundary of thing, spirit, and speech can be vague and contestable. So with this we can concoct another category: from dead object to the hauntedness of things. What is at stake is not really the disputability of things, but the hazy boundary between living things and dead things. As such, the imagined show of **mono** versions would be possibly far more tainted with comparative religious practices all over the world, which are almost entirely lacking here, a sort of a ghostly show of things in the parallel world based on the ephemeral etymo-philosophy of **mono**-ness.

The more troublesome case is the concept of **representation**. It is in fact almost eye-opening for non-Westerners to observe how this small term, derived from **representare** of Latin, has spread its ramifications, stretching conceptual capillaries from philosophy to art, law, politics, and even AI. And that is why the battle cry of "crisis of representation" can have simultaneous echoes in different realms of disciplines, from parliamentary politics to ecological robotics.

But here again the success story of the notion of the crisis of representation hits home only with those who share, in this case, its Latin heritage. The historical connections of this concept will be eliminated when translated, and the halo of the sweeping philosophical critique may dwindle rather quickly. Let’s observe here concretely and in detail the predicament of the translated conceptual network.

Translated into Japanese, the term **representation** becomes a lot of different and seemingly unrelated terms. If it is about a sign or way of showing something, it is usually translated as **byōji** (**byō** = show, **ji** = point). If it is about politics like representative democracy, it is **daigi** (**dai** = replace, **gi** = argue) or **daihyō** (**dai** = replace, **hyō** = show).

1. The photo shown here is **hari-kayō**, literally a memorial service for needles. This kind of ritual for showing the users’ thankfulness is not confined to needles, however. Things and tools close to our everyday activities, such as dolls, brushes, scissors or even mortars, are traditionally given such specific ritual service. The idea behind this is that the users owe them a debt of gratitude for their **collaboration**, which should be ritually returned.

2. One of the well-known theoretical reflections on the notion of **mono** was created by a number of artists called **Mono-ha** (School of Things) in the 1970s, questioning the fundamental relation between the human and material world by making use of such things as trees, stones, papers, earth, and so on as material. However, it requires further scrutiny to determine whether their employment of the concept of **mono** is more rooted in the traditional etymological ramifications of the meaning of **mono** than simply questioning the Western notion of object. In fact, their theoretical reflection seems rather closer to the organizer’s leitmotiv for the show, from **object to things**, than the pre-modern reflection on **mono**-ness, which is represented in, say, a very well-known concept of "**mono no aware**" (the sense of being affected deeply by things in everyday experience) as the essence of the Japanese culture, claimed by a nativist philosopher of pre-modern Japan, Moto'ori Norimaga. As to **Mono-ha**, see Shigeo Chiba, "Mono-ha,” in: *The Dictionary of Art*, Jane Turner (ed.), Macmillan publishing company, London and New York, 21, 1996, p. 892; Edward M. Gomez, “Mono-ha,” in: *Art News*, 88, 3, 1989, p. 191. As to **mono no aware**, see Harry D. Harootunian, *Things seen and unseen: Discourse and ideology in Tokugawa nativism*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1988.
and if it is in a philosophical sense, like a critique of representation, it is an ugly neologism, *hyōshō* (*hyō* = show, *shō* = image), which is scarcely used in everyday conversation, just like the Husserlian *noesis* and *noema* which, I firmly believe, are hardly used to buy a chicken nugget, even in Freiburg.

This exotic show of the translated terms demonstrates that in the process of translation, the original web of the term *representation* in various domains is shattered, dissected and replaced with seemingly mutually unrelated terms, the interrelation of which is very hard to find for those who do not know the original term well.

And what is particularly confusing is the case of AI. In this area, a key term like knowledge representation is officially translated as *chishiki* (knowledge-*hyōgen*. But this *hyōgen* is a very common term for *expression* (like *hyōgen-shugi*, expressionism). So if it is re-translated back into English, the term would become knowledge *expression*! Imagine, then, a know-it-all philosopher who would like to talk about the philosophical distinction between *representation* and *expression*; these AI experts would be totally at a loss, as in AI these are the same words, *hyōgen*!

Now, strictly speaking, the crisis of representation is virtually untranslatable into Japanese. Of course as it is usually from the philosophical context that this type of vogue buzzphrase breeds, its translation will be ordinarily the ugly neologism of *hyōshō*, “the crisis of *hyōshō*”. But this philosophical version of translation contains no element of *replacing*, so probably this would be the hardest word for politicians and AI experts to understand what it means.

If a Japanese philosopher wants seriously to convey the message of the “crisis of representation,” either he has to enumerate all the possible translations like “crisis of *hyōshō*-hyōji-daigi-hyō-

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3 Thus the Japanese dictionary of cognitive science has to carry two different streams of the translation of “representation”: one from the tradition of AI (*hyōgen*), the other from philosophical argument on representationism (*hyōshō*-shugi).
gen-“ and so on, or he has to authoritatively grant (and often he indeed would) these ignorant politicians and AI experts a bit of a lengthy lecture on the conceptual history of the word representation in Europe and how it is related with this and that areas. Then you would hear these exhausted-looking mediocrities complaining, “There are always eggheaded arguments going on somewhere in Paris, probably near the rue d’Ulm or Jardins de Luxembourg...”

Now what shall we do to combat this translational mess? I can think of at least two opposing attitudes about this situation: one is that of a pacifist, the other, a militant. The pacifist attitude is personified by the non-EU audience: Lamenting the difficulty of translating these deeply European terms and arguments into their own languages, they submissively accept them and try hard to learn from that. That’s a docile, good pupil’s attitude.

The militant, probably a minor species, would conclude on the contrary that such an argument, based on intra-European etymology and conceptual boundary, is simply a local, ethnic European (meaning the European as the ethnic minority of the globe, in the sense of population at least) phenomenon not extendable to the non-Western context. He would then continue that the failure of the translation is not the failure of his non-Western language but intrinsically the heterogeneity (and even the intra-incommensurability) of the concept representation itself. Thus even though the phenomenon like democracy and the knowledge system of AI are both conventionally described with the term representation, these are fundamentally mutually unrelated phenomena, and there is no such unified thing as representation and the crisis of it!

If you abandon the pacifist’s appeasement policy to agree with the militant’s claim, the whole scheme of the show – the comparison of the practical solutions for the crisis of representation – collapses, because from the beginning there is no such thing as a unified notion of representation. Politics and AI are quite different phenomena, as has been shown in their translation, and the idea of comparison is ineffective because the conceptual lynchpin itself is fragile.

But then I wonder if this is really a stumbling block only for non-EU citizens. Picture an imaginary meeting between a Japanese politician and an AI specialist. The former is troubled with the unruly situation in the Diet, while the latter is thinking about a new method of more effective programming. Do they understand each other simply because their problems are rooted in the crisis of representation? I believe there needs to be a quantum leap from their actual experience to the philosophically sublime notion of representation. For understanding the real intention of the meeting, both of them should be indoctrinated as well to translate their practices into the philosophical jargons barely used in an everyday context.

But then we have to be careful not to underestimate the power of indoctrination. I said I almost stumbled, but that is an expression for showing a sense of anxiety; I actually did not stumble, because I have learned the history of the term representation through which I became aware that both politics and AI share the term, which is derived from Latin. With such previous indoctrination, even the seemingly disparate equivalent of daiji (politics) and hyōgen (AI) can be equalized with the help of the added conceptual bracket like daiji (representation) = hyōgen (representation). This bracketing is just like a mental crutch without

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4 The point here is that the neologism accompanying such translation cannot be fully understood without tacitly referring to the original term in parentheses. This double structure of the translated terms often causes lot of conceptual confusion. Tetsuro Nakaoka, a leading philosopher of science and technology in Japan, points out the deep-rooted confusion evoked by translated concepts such as technology. Usually the term technology is translated as gijutsu, like kagaku-gijutsu (science and technology), and engineering as kōgaku. But this correspondence reverses when we talk about the department of technology, which is not department of gijutsu (technology) but of kōgaku (engineering), and an engineer, not kōgaku-sha, but gijutsu-sha! In a series of debates conducted by Japanese Marxists, the theoretical distinction between gijutsu and kōgaku was thought to be fundamental in understanding the essence of technology, but Nakaoka points out that this distinction in the context of the Japanese language does not correspond well to the distinction between technology and engineering. In this case the assistance of the bracketed original term is not of much help but is a source of confusion, which shows the fundamental difficulty of philosophizing with a mass of translated terminologies where the conceptual networks are hopelessly fragmented and wordplays or etymological practices do not work at all from the beginning. See Tetsuro Nakaoka, “A reflection on Japanese language: technology,” in: The Process of understanding things: Science and the time that I lived, Asahi-shimbunsha, Tokyo, 1980, pp. 121-147 (in Japanese).
which we cannot think properly. And this is exactly what the power of the pedagogy has done to us. Once you are imprinted with this local network of concepts, your thought cannot be really free from that. And this coercive pedagogic process allows the local conceptual network to survive by limitlessly incorporating, influencing, disciplining those who are outside the domestic and international boundary of European intellectual history.

So this is why I cannot be a full-fledged militant, insisting that the whole scheme of the exhibition is groundless. The imaginary militancy is to be replaced with actual anxiety. Anxiety, because – understanding the effectiveness and the power of the conceptual network and etymological feat of analyzing thing and representation within the European context – after all I feel this is a typical Eurocentric act of reproducing and renewing Europeans’ historical heritage, which non-EU citizens have nothing to do with beyond being docilely indoctrinated or at most being marginally exhibited at the corner of the show with a small number of ethnological cases in atonement for such historical indoctrination.5

But don’t imagine that I want to blow up the show in Al Qaeda fashion. Rather than being either a pacifist or a militant, I would like to be a third kind: an ethnographical observer who poses an empirical question. Being deeply impressed with the almost invincible fortress of inherited conceptual structure of European tradition, which seems to be too hard to conquer with the ordinary method of conceptual criticism, this question should be asked: Can non-European thought make its appearance without relying on the translation of exotic concepts but in the forms of things?

It is true that some things, from futon to Walkman, have done a fairly good job in this context, but even they are far from being recognized as non-Western thought or even philosophy as such. So my question is: Do these exhibited things – tools, photos, audio-visual presentations – have the power to surmount the limited constraint of the particular local conceptual systems? Actually this fundamental question cannot be fully answered in this show because the initial conceptual structure and the rhetorical devices are all made in Europe. Yet, there is room to observe a sort of hidden effect of the show, which may liberate the audience from the intra-European etymo-philosophical guideline, so as to feel and to create something new and open to non-Western conceptual systems not clearly pre-planned nor highlighted in the show itself. Not limited to the motto “from objects to things” but encompassing something quite different, say, the hauntedness of things, then boundaries of life and death and things in between that are inspired by mono, a conceptual scheme different from European etymology.

If these exhibited things, though benignly Eurocentric, can indeed create in the minds of the audience something yet invisible and unpredicted even by the organizer, then I confess I have a hope for the future: that these things may have more power to convey latent non-Western philosophy than ordinary translation of exotic philosophy with a capital P. And this hope leads us, in this show, to an unintended smaller backdoor, leading not to the provincial European constitution of things as is advertised by the organizer, but to a more global, real universal meeting place of thought yet to come, by the very power of the exhibition of things. Then, along with my beloved Turkish friends, who are eager to be a part of the expanding European Union, I am pleased to come to the show despite the Kafkaesque gatekeepers in the shape of parochial conceptual puns and etymologies.

5 However, the power of indoctrination and the ensuing parentheses added to the translated terms do not always work well. What frequently happens is the free circulation of such an empty neologism as byakko – representation in the philosophical context – exactly because its meaning is hard to comprehend. Akira Yanaba, a prominent translation theorist, calls this phenomenon the “cassette effect”. According to Yanaba, a neologism is attractive precisely because it is semantically empty. Like a good-looking cassette, the term fascinates its speakers by its sheer appearance as a term, insinuating that there might be something good in inside, and its semantic emptiness paradoxically encourages its users to fill the semantic vacuum by projecting their own images stimulated by the term itself. And Yanaba believes this is not a normal process of our linguistic practice through which new meanings are created. The problem then is that once this creative cassette effect starts to work and the transformation of the original meaning advances so far, it may become one of the most serious obstructions to inter-cultural theoretical dialogue, as Nakaoka so sharply points out. See Akira Yanaba, What is translation: Japanese language and the culture of translation, Hosei University Press, Tokyo, 1976, chap. 1 (in Japanese).