Preface

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> The volatile truth of our words should continually betray the inadequacy of the residual statement. Their truth is instantly translated; its literal monument alone remains. The words which express our faith and piety are not definite; yet they are significant and fragrant like frankincense to superior natures. – Henry D. Thoreau
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> I have but one language – yet that language is not mine.
> – Jacque Derrida

A two-day intensive course, entitled "Thinking about education through film," took place online on February 5 and 6, 2022. This was a part of the collaborative teaching and cross-cultural exchange between the Graduate School of Education, Kyoto University, and UCL IOE as part of Kyoto's ongoing International Collaborative Course, supported by the Global Education Office at Kyoto University. It was co-taught by Professor Paul Standish from the IOE and by Naoko Saito from Kyoto University. There were five students participating from Kyoto, and four participants from the British side, including one from Warwick University[1]. Under the circumstances of the pandemic of COVID-19, this is the second year that the course has been conducted on Zoom. Like last year, the cultural and linguistic background of the participants was diverse – Japanese, British, Ethiopian-Indian and Korean. Their disciplinary background this year was also diverse – ranging from philosophy, philosophy of education, cognitive psychology, and media studies. This small publication provides a record of the lively dialogue that took place for these two days.

Thoreau addressed a question: "Could a greater miracle take place than for us to look through each other's eyes for an instant?" (Thoreau 1992, p. 6). Indeed this two-day intensive course was an occasion in which a minor miracle took place of looking through each other's eyes through the medium of film – and a miracle of translating perspectives and ways of thinking happened. And this was exactly the theme of this year's course. It is surprising to find that such experience can be made possible online, and the course this year has proved that it is possible to create "face-to-face" relationships online.

Centering on the theme of translation, we considered two films – Sophia Coppola's film, *Lost in Translation* (2003), and Alejandro González Iñárritu's *Babel* (2006). In combination with the films, we also read Paul Standish's "Social Justice in. translation" (2011), Naoko Saito's *American Philosophy in Translation* (2019) and Jacques Derrida's *Monolingualism of the Other* (1998) and passages from

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Stanley Cavell and Henry D. Thoreau. We began by setting the problem of the one-way traffic of communication from the West to the East with the global dominance of English. Against this background the limited mentality of monoligualism was criticized, and as a way out of this impasse, the importance of translation was introduced. The idea of translation we discussed in the course went beyond any simple sense of linguistic exchange, and as the quote in the beginning from Thoreau indicates, the concept is permeated with the sense of transitivity and volatility that inheres in language, the meaning of words always extending beyond what we intend. Following Stanley Cavell's ordinary language philosophy, we thematized this as "philosophy as translation" – "the work of philosophy to make human existence, or show it to be, strange to itself," with philosophy understood as involving "the transfiguration from one form of life to another" (Cavell, Forthcoming). In this sense, we began with the idea that translation is a metonym of our lives, one that is concerned with the transformation and transfiguration of our lives. Through such a lens of translation, we discussed the two films.

On the first day, we discussed extracts from *Lost in Translation*. This is a film about two Americans, Bob and Charlotte, who both come to Japan for a short period of time and experience diverse levels of miscommunication and misunderstanding in a foreign culture.

On the surface, the film seems to present a caricature of the distinctive aspects of Japanese culture. Beyond such a stereotypical interpretation, we went deeper – considering in particular the perspective of the loss of the self, the search for one's soul, and the bringing about of its transformation and rebirth. Here below is a remark by Standish that was shared in the chat during the class:

> The film is called Lost in Translation, not Recovery from Being Lost in Translation, so we can end up seeing that the central characters still don't know much about Japan, they are still lost. But then, so I have been trying to understand, there is something in them that is different, and they are both somehow in a better position than when they went to Tokyo. They are more ready to live their lives, and there is, for them, a

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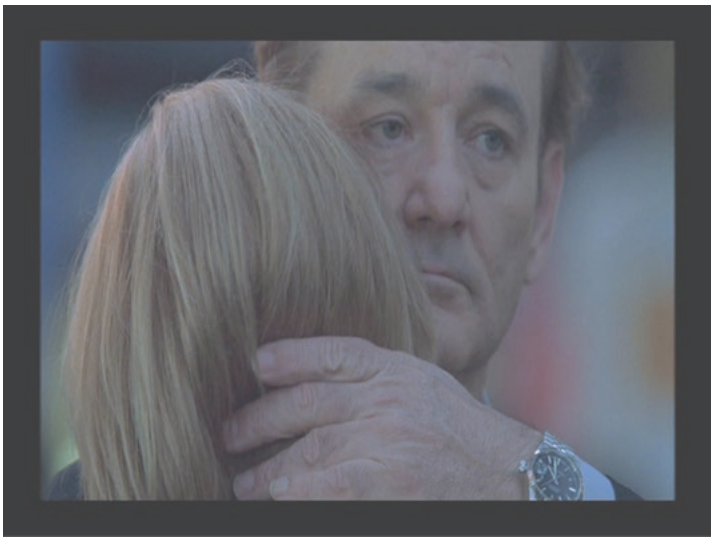
> kind of remarriage with the world. This is not the kind of overwhelming transformation that is depicted in Christian conversion, for example, but something of a more subtle and gentle kind, more partial, and needing to be renewed again and again perhaps. I think it is right to See Cavell Emerson and Thoreau as interested in those little transformations, available to us every day, and there in the language we use.

We considered the film as a perfectionist story: neither Bob nor Charlotte find something solid in the end; they do not learn some substantial lesson from their encounter with Japanese culture. But they do still learn to leave, that they must about their old selves in translation, with the conviction that "we can turn" (Cavell 1992, p. 97). Members of the class themselves underwent such moments of transformation and recognition as they tested their words in conversation with each other.



We discussed the film, both in small groups, and as a whole group, touching on various themes related to the film, including the nature of the relationship between Bob and Charlotte and the issue of whether they really underwent a transformation of the self in Japan.

On the second day, we continued the discussion on *Lost in Translation*. In the latter part of the class, Standish gave a lecture on Derrida's *Monolingualism of the Other* (1988). For Derrida, language is the origin of our thought. We do not possess language. We are already and always linguistic beings. And the sign is unsaturated in meaning: that is, it can always absorb further meaning. Language has an openness to interpretations and new connections; your words always exceed you. Language is beyond us, ahead of us. The circulation of signs disturbs who I am. Due to such undecidability and unpredictability of language, what we call our "identity" cannot be fully grasped. Instead of the fixation of identity – whether self-identity or national identity – we, as linguistic beings, suffer from a disorder of identity. Students seem to be destabilized by Derrida's provocative views on language and identity. These views challenge the conceptions of meaning in terms of the correspondence of a signs with things, revealing the force of what we say and do with words and showing language to be not like an instrument we use but rather like an element in which we can come to be.

Then in the end, we moved on to the discussion on another film, *Babel*. The myth of Babel originates in the book of Genesis in the Bible. According to the myth, there was originally only one language in the world. The people gathered together and resolved to build a city in the form of a tower that would reach up to heaven. God saw what they were doing and thought that, if people were thinking in this way, nothing would hold them back. And so he divided them by giving them many different languages so that they could not understand one another. The film, *Babel*, explores this biblical theme. The scenes are in Morocco, Japan, the United States, and the Mexican/Californian border. Diverse cultural perspectives and different languages are crossed in the course of the film, and the gaps and misunderstandings are thematized, even to the degree of despair and death. Translation then is an implicit theme of this film – the translation of identities, the confrontation between cultures, the relationship between deafness and speech, and the operation of power and privilege through all these things.

And in comparison to *Lost in Translation*, the overall tone of *Babel* is more tragic: actual death is foregrounded and the sense of suffering permeates the film as a whole. All can suffer, no matter what their status or origin. But the outcome of suffering, the means of dealing with it, differs according to economic circumstances. This is poignantly illustrated in the closing scenes of the film, where a seriously ill American woman, who has been shot in an accident, is at last rescued from the remote desert villages of Morocco by helicopter. In long tracking shots the helicopter is seen flying across the desert landscape as the sun goes down, then over the rooftops of Casablanca, and onto the roof of a hospital, where a host of nursing staff seem to be waiting to receive her and treat her, transporting her in turn to the advanced medical care that awaits her in the United States. One of the students expressed his view that perhaps in this film, the experience of translation was blocked due to the tragic incidents. Another said that in view of the tragic incidents of the film, any perfectionist line of interpretation sounds to be too positive. Standish drew attention to the failures of communication that were illustrated early on in the film, where teenage girls from a school for the deaf were seen failing to communicate successfully over what they saw as the umpire's bad line-call: unable to explain themselves, they resorted to making rude gestures. Failures of communication were repeated throughout the film. But he also made the point that it would be a misunderstanding of perfectionism to think that it must relate to films with happy outcomes: an important part of perfectionism is that we should be ashamed of the state of our own condition and of the political arrangements, the failed democracies, within which we live.

With regard to the idea of film and education, there are three pedagogical objectives in particular

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that we attempted to achieve in the course. The first was to find ways of engaging Japanese students in discussion in English. When Japanese students were unsure about Standish's lecture in English, we created an occasion for them to speak in Japanese in a small group discussion. Then after they had gained more confidence about what they wanted to say, they shared it more easily with other people in English. On another occasion, a small group was created that combined Japanese and non-Japanese students. We have found to be an effective way of initiating Japanese students into discussion in English. As the time went by, Japanese students became more active in expressing their opinions in English. The second objective was to help the Japanese students to brush up of their writing skills in English. In the IOE-Kyoto exchange we incorporate some mentoring assistance by British students in the proofreading of Japanese students' papers. These proceedings are the consummation of such pedagogical endeavor. The third objective was to learn how to view and review film. We were constantly encouraged by Standish to pay particular attention to particular scenes from the films – considering such factors as the angle of the camera, the bodily movements of characters, their facial expressions, the words they uttered – and this guided us in turn to see how Bob and Charlotte both underwent processes of transformation. Standish also pointed out that the originality of *Lost in Translation* in its manner of constructing a divergence in the experience of viewing the film, a divergence arising from language and cultural differences amongst its audience. This prevented the achieving any neutral perspective on the film: there was no view from nowhere, and to realise this was itself educative in an important way. We learned how to be engaged in the phenomena of the ordinary lives of the characters through reading and rereading the film. This was itself a process of our own education, where we learned how to see the world again, through "each other's eyes." It was a characteristic of the course that through close attention to particular scenes of the films, possibilities of interpretation and lines of analysis were explored and extended in conversation with others. The students learned that film, as the medium of teaching and learning allows us to see things and people in the details of ordinary life: this expands the capacity to think philosophically. This has a bearing on students' engagement and re-engagement with language, and on the way they undertake research in the humanities. We hope that students who were engaged in dialogue on the films could undergo their own processes of translation.

The event is the result of a sustained exchange and collaboration between the IOE and Kyoto over the past nineteen years. The joint course began in 2014. The course has run alternately in London and Kyoto, but this year was the second occasion when it was held online. We hope that the collaborative teaching with the IOE will continue to be an example of initiating Kyoto students into the seminar style of foreign institutions and will inspire students to study abroad, even at this difficult time of COVID-19.

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