

Introduction: New Voices Between Cultures

When I have an event here [Japan] and I suspend a rock, the Japanese say: ah, Western influence. We never suspend rocks. Rocks belong on the ground. If I go to Australia and use a rock and suspend it, they [Australians] say: ah, Japanese influence. You're using rocks. (Stelarc)¹

Stelarc is an internationally known Australian performance artist who had lived in Japan for nearly twenty years. Stelarc's comment above points toward the complexities and contradictions migrants often encounter in a host country that place them 'in-between' cultures.

The act of migration, moving from a place with which we are familiar to a different place, can affect us greatly, not because of cultural difference per se, but because of 'the inner dynamics of migration,' as Paul Carter discusses.² Carter categorises the experience of migrants in terms of two types: those who bring their own cultures to new environments and those who assimilate themselves to new host cultures, shrugging off their former cultural identity. Of course, migrants' experiences are not as clear-cut as this; nevertheless, the dichotomous thinking of 'here and there' in the psyches of both locals and newcomers remains.

After a period of nostalgia, a migrant begins to see her culture of origin from a distance. Aspects of the culture of the host country become part of the migrant's thinking, despite her uneasiness or unfamiliarity with the new culture. In this situation, the migrant is floating in the cultural ingredients of both her country of origin and host country: that is to say, the migrant belongs neither to there nor here. Stepping outside of their houses, however, migrants are made more conscious of 'difference' whenever they negotiate social relations in new terrain. Migrants experience the peculiarity of what might be called an in-between space (including artistic space, as in Stelarc's case), where cultural commonplaces can contradict each other and the differences between cultures can seem incommensurable.

The contradictory in-between space between cultures is, in fact, a fertile ground for academic exploration. The voices of the contributors in this inaugural issue of *New Voices*, indeed, speak of the negotiation of social and cultural spaces between Australia and Japan, relating personal experience to the problematics and context of their research. The *New Voices* project has been developed as the second phase of '*Australianese and Japaralians?: A Celebration of Transformation at the Australia-Japan Interface*', the 10th

¹ In the work Stelarc describes here, his body was suspended in the air by ropes from hooks piercing his skin, to counter the weight of stones at the other end of the ropes. This quote comes from a transcript of an interview with Stelarc by Geoffrey De Groen in *Some Other Dream*, p. 87.

² Carter, *Living in a New Country*, pp. 98–99.

anniversary forum of the Japan Foundation, Sydney, which was held in 2003. That forum surveyed a range of cultural transferences and transactions, focusing on how Australians who have lived in Japan and expatriate Japanese in Australia have transformed the challenges of their cross-cultural experiences into a positive, creative impulse. This issue of *New Voices*, on the other hand, aims to examine cross-cultural issues arising at the interface between the two countries in depth, with regard to the complexities such encounters can engender. *New Voices* is also conceived as a forum for discussions in Japan-related studies and attract Australian students and researchers to this area. The contributors have been encouraged to mix scholarly discussion with personal experience in order to make *New Voices* accessible to a wider audience.

The contributors examine the complexities of the relationship between Australia and Japan on professional and personal levels. Lachlan Jackson's research on the role of the English-speaking father in bilingual child-rearing in Japan, for example, stems from his situation as an Australian male lecturer with a Japanese wife and two children, living in Japan. Similarly, Sean O'Connell's study of the linguistic and cultural competence of Australian expatriates in the Japanese workplace directly relates to the fact that he is an interpreter and intercultural communication trainer. Others have turned personal interests in Japanese culture toward their academic research. For instance, an exposure to *chanoyu* ('Tea'), as an exchange student has had a great impact on Rebecca Corbett, leading her to pursue academic research on the history of women in *chanoyu*. Interestingly, Corbett emphasises that being a foreigner – thus, an outsider – has given her leeway and enabled her to critically examine established Japanese *chanoyu* scholarship. Elise Foxworth similarly points out that, because she is a *daisansha* (third person) in Japan, she feels she is more able to notice and appreciate minority arts and cultures in Japan, *zainichi* Korean literature (the literature of Koreans living in Japan) in particular. People who dwell in the in-between spaces of culture are often able to see things in ways that the locals cannot.

This perspective of the contributors has, directly and indirectly, sprung from the process of negotiation and adjustment in the encounter between Australia and Japan, which generates a new kind of exchange and creates new kinds of communication. In this regard, an initial feeling of amusement or astonishment about unfamiliar cultural characteristics may be regarded as a starting point for cultural understanding. Mayumi Parry's language education research, for instance, discusses the positive effects of the short encounter of Australian homestay students and their Japanese host families. Adam Broinowski's essay, on the other hand, examines the complexities of a cross-cultural exchange through the NIDA (National Institute of Dramatic Arts) student production of a contemporary Japanese play on *hikikomori* (a contemporary social phenomenon in Japan where adolescents to adults seclude themselves at home for a long period). The experience of the encounter with the 'otherness' of Japanese culture may remain for a long time in the minds of these Australian students.

Dr Christine de Matos, an historian, discusses engagement with the cultural ‘other’, in particular, the recollection of the encounter between Australian military personnel and Japanese workers in the postwar period in Japan. According to de Matos, in spite of the wartime propaganda and stereotypical images that had been circulated in each country about the other as an enemy, the encounter generated more positive memories than negative. Here, personal histories can be used to reread the textbook history of the relationship between Australia and Japan. Likewise, Ben McInnes’s historical analysis draws attention to a gap between the coverage about Japan by the city-based newspapers and the actual interaction with and understanding of the Japanese by rural Australians in the New England region of New South Wales. McInnes argues that the people in the bush had a neutral or positive attitude toward Japan and the Japanese people despite political and military tensions in North-East Asia in the pre-World War I period. These stories highlight how the cultural exchanges people make at a personal level often defy a fixed (political or otherwise) reading of exchanges between Australia and Japan.

It may no longer be useful or relevant to examine these exchanges in a geographically and ethnologically fixed way in a globally networked world, and particularly, in a multicultural society like Australia’s. Researchers who are themselves migrants can bring a multi-layered perspective to the relationship between Australia and Japan. Dr Cristina Rocha observes cultural understandings and misunderstandings between Australia, Japan and Brazil in terms of the circulation of images that perpetuate cultural stereotypes of each country. Living in these three countries has enabled Rocha to step outside the limits of a here/there framework. She is able to consider, in a global sense, the function of institutionalised cultural traditions, cultural trends, and what the notion of a hybrid culture might mean in this context.

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New Voices is, of course, indebted to the contributors for sharing their intriguing personal stories and exciting academic research. The editorial team wishes them every success in future.

Yuji Sone
Editor, Volume 1

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