

8. Continuing Education with Stanley Cavell

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Remarks given at a memorial event, "Celebrating the Life and Work of Stanley Cavell," convened in Emerson Hall 105, Harvard University, Saturday, November 10, 2018.

How many times in my life have I re-encountered my teacher, Stanley Cavell? The most memorable, the first encounter with him was in the winter of 1996 at Harvard—the image still vivid in my memory, the snow falling outside the window of his room, with me sitting in front of Stanley. At the suggestions of a teaching assistant of Hilary Putnam, who had read my term paper, I made an appointment with Stanley and introduced myself along with my abiding question regarding American philosophy. When I presented this as my being “torn” between Emerson and Dewey, Stanley reacted immediately and expressed his sense of sympathy with me. That was the beginning of a kind of continuing education for me and of the lifelong task I consider myself to have shared with him.

Since then, Stanley had a deep impact on my life and career at various crucial moments. One of them was the defense of my dissertation, *Democratic Education for Holistic Growth: Dewey's Naturalistic Philosophy of Growth Reconstructed in the Light of Emersonian Moral Perfectionism*, which took place at Teachers College in 2000. Stanley was one of the examiners. Another was my translation into Japanese of *The Senses of Walden*, which was published in 2005. I cannot remember how many times I had talked to him in order to accomplish this baffling task of translating his English into a foreign language (this with the help of Paul Standish who translated Cavell's English into a translatable English). The publication of the collection I edited with Paul, *Stanley Cavell and the Education of Grownups* in 2012 was also momentous in my connection with Stanley. This was a product of a colloquium we organized at Harvard with Stanley and Hilary in the fall of 2007.

Most recently I cherish the memory of Stanley holding in his hand the book that Paul and I presented to him in March 2017: *Stanley Cavell and Philosophy as Translation: The Truth is Translated*.

Without his presence over many years, when I went back and forth between Japan and the United States, and after I had physically settled and apparently settled down in Kyoto, I would not have been able to establish my career as a Japanese female researcher of American philosophy. I would like briefly to say that my encounter with Stanley cannot be separated from what I see as a cross-cultural dimension in his words and life.

Cavell as an Orienter: American Philosophy in Translation

In my academic work, with its tensions between Dewey and Emerson (and Thoreau), and between pragmatism and American transcendentalism, I have explored Cavell's ordinary language philosophy from the perspective of translation. Dewey's notion of communication contrasts with and is destabilized by the Emersonian and Thoreauvian notion of translation. As a Japanese person, I see Cavell as an "orienter" within America ("orienter" being a word he applies to Thoreau¹). He encourages America to open its eyes to diverse cross-cultural dimensions. Anxieties about what America can become—both carrying its inheritance from Europe and freeing itself from that past—are inherent in Cavell's conception of America, and this crucially conditions his ordinary language philosophy. Cavell is a translator between different strands of thought and language, including the "dissonant voices" of American philosophy. He has described himself as working in "the tear in philosophy," the rift that has been left, in the wake of Kant, and hence connecting Anglo-American and continental philosophy.

His cross-cultural sensibilities are manifested even *within* American philosophy, in intra-cultural and intra-linguistic ways. He resists any facile account of the lineage between Emerson and Thoreau and pragmatism, which might indeed consti-

1. See Cavell, *The Senses of Walden* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992), 125.

tute a further failure in their reception.² Emphasizing this tension, he has helped me to see that American philosophy has always been in the process of translation. My most recent book, which has the title *American Philosophy in Translation*, feels like a continuing gift from Cavell.

When it comes to the understanding of *other* cultures, Cavell invokes a deflatory yet apt, distinctively American idiom: riffing on the baseball terms “home” and “base,” he suggests that the point may not be to hit a “homerun,” not to understand another culture as a whole, but at least to try to get to “first base.”³ He rejects the mindset that is intent on finding equivalences. What is at stake is to be found in what happens as paths of thought intersect: in how each of us is to confront such moments in reorienting our ways of thinking; how each moment may turn us around, so that we learn to go on in new ways. His philosophy is then cultural criticism from within—and, that is, from within a certain sense of shame.⁴ His critical stance within his own “native” culture has seemed to resonate, for me, with my own stance with my apparently native culture, Japan. His oblique cultural criticism has been a model for me for what it means to be a cultural critic at home.

Translating *The Senses*

In the light of these observations it will be apparent that my own experience of translating his *The Senses of Walden* has been most enlightening. What is written in the book as well as my struggle with the work of translation has shown me that translation *is* at the heart of his ordinary language philosophy.

Cavell hardly ever talks about translation explicitly, and yet in his pursuit of ordinary language philosophy, the idea of translation appears both as a substantive feature and as itself thematized. In the aforementioned edited collection, Paul and I

2. See Cavell, *Conditions Handsome and Unhandsome: The Constitution of Emersonian Perfectionism* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1990) and *Emerson's Transcendental Etudes*, ed. David Justin Hodge (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003).

3. See Paul Standish and Naoko Saito, eds., *Stanley Cavell and Philosophy as Translation: "The Truth is Translated"* (London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2017) and Cavell, “Walden in Tokyo,” to be published in *Stanley Cavell and the Thoughts of Other Cultures*, ed. Paul Standish and Naoko Saito.

4. See Cavell and Paul Standish, “Stanley Cavell in Conversation with Paul Standish,” *Journal of Philosophy of Education* 46, no. 2 (2012): 155-76.

have explored Cavell's work via the idea of *philosophy as translation*.⁵ Cavell's language itself enacts this process of translation, in all its transitivity and volatility.⁶ What Cavell means by translation is beyond any simple sense of linguistic exchange. Indeed the fantasy of any idea of equivalence brings with it the tacit assumption that languages are pure, stable, and more or less complete in themselves, which settles easily into a correspondence theory of truth, in a representationalist view of the world. In reality, translation involves an attunement to what happens in the encounter between different languages (Japanese, English, French, etc.), and this inevitably involves ordinarily the experience of a gap—a gap of the “untranslatable.”⁷ Language is open to new possibilities all the time, and hence, it both surprises us and disappoints us. Indeed, Cavell says, any sign opens to new possibilities—it has a “projective” nature⁸—and this is at the heart of translation. In Cavell's ordinary language philosophy, translation is at work not only inter- but intra-lingually. It involves experiencing “the difficulty of knowing that we do not know”:⁹ we are surprised by what is beyond our grasp.¹⁰ Translation is not simply a substitute or metaphor for human transformation. Rather, as the experience of rebirth in rewording the world and of taking new interest in the world, translation is transformation: it is a *metonym* of our lives.

It is this very rich sense of translation that I acquired in my own experience of translating *The Senses of Walden*. Cavell's language asked to be translated in multiple senses—not simply from English into Japanese, between distinct language systems, but also from English to English! In “Walden in Tokyo,” an essay Stanley wrote in 2005, in commemoration of this translation, he says that translation involves “the transfiguration from one form of life to another.”¹¹ This is the experience I underwent

5. See Standish and Saito, *Stanley Cavell and Philosophy as Translation*.

6. Cavell, *The Senses of Walden*, 27.

7. Barbara Cassin, *Nostalgia: Where Are We Ever at Home?* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2016).

8. Cavell, *The Claim of Reason: Wittgenstein, Skepticism, Morality, and Tragedy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), 180.

9. David LaRocca and Ricardo Miguel-Alfonso, eds., *A Power to Translate the World: New Essays on Emerson and International Culture* (Lebanon, New Hampshire: Dartmouth College Press and The University Press of New England, 2015), 15.

10. See Naoko Saito, “Emerson and Japan: Finding a Way of Cultural Criticism,” in *A Power to Translate the World: New Essays on Emerson and International Culture*, ed. David LaRocca and Ricardo Miguel-Alfonso (Lebanon, New Hampshire: Dartmouth College Press and The University Press of New England, 2015), 217–35.

11. Cavell, “Walden in Tokyo” (my italics).

in the process of translation, a holistic conversion of the way I am engaged with language—both English as a foreign language and Japanese as my apparently native language, which belong to completely alien language systems. The distinctive experience here is that Cavell’s language never allowed me to settle down on any fixed ground: it kept asking me to *be outside*—outside of the conventional definition of a word, of language in its dictionary definitions—as if I were at a border, poised unsteadily above an abyss. It was the experience of being outside within the language: or in Thoreau’s words, the experience of acquiring the standpoint of a “double.”¹² I perceive Stanley to be a philosopher who teaches his reader and his students to stay outside within the familiar: and who encourages us to speak, to borrow Thoreau’s words, in “*extra-vagance*”¹³—that is, to wander outside.

This is related to his sense of immigrancy, both in the everyday sense of his father being an immigrant to the United States and in the philosophical sense of embracing “immigrancy as the native human condition.”¹⁴ In his autobiographical writings, Stanley expresses the sense of being caught in the abyss of culture, of being foreign in the native.¹⁵ (“Immigrancy of the self” is the title of my chapter in *Stanley Cavell and Philosophy as Translation*.) The radicalism of his philosophy is the voice of cultural criticism from within. He always reassures me that there is a certain way in which one can be an outsider inside and that one can still raise a voice of criticism, while standing precariously on the border—within Japan, between Japan and America.

The Teacher Who Leaves: Kindred from Distant Lands

To say, “Follow me and you will be saved,” you must be sure you are of God. But to say, “Follow in yourself what I follow in mine and you will be saved,” you merely have to be sure you are following yourself. This frightens and cheers me.¹⁶

12. Cavell, *The Senses of Walden*, 102.

13. Henry David Thoreau, *Walden and Resistance to Civil Government*, ed. William Rossi (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1992), 216.

14. Cavell, *The Senses of Walden*, 158.

15. See Cavell, *Little Did I Know: Excerpts from Memory* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2010).

16. Cavell, *The Senses of Walden*, 160.

Cavell's text always allows me, the reader, to save space for something new to be discovered: there is always, to borrow Emerson's words, "a residuum unknown, unanalyzable."¹⁷ Since the time of my first encounter with Stanley, more than twenty years have passed. The last time I paid my annual visit to Stanley and Cathleen, in Boston in March 2018, at a time when he was nearing the end of his life, his warm affection was again extended toward me. He had been and still is for me, in Thoreau's words, "kindred from a distant land."¹⁸ And so there remains the poignant sense that "what is most intimate is what is furthest away" and that "the realization of 'our infinite relations,' our kinships, is an endless realization of our separateness" (*The Senses of Walden*). The greatness of Stanley Cavell as a philosopher and as a teacher is that he always leaves his student with the hope of (and sometimes in despair at the need for) finding her own words, instead of repeating his words. I confront what it is that I have to follow in my own way. He has left me with a sometimes desperate sense of singularity. I always felt that his words left me with new tasks. This time he has suddenly left, quietly and permanently: and again, I am left with the thought of what he calls "the pain of individuation."¹⁹ This is the lesson of his many exemplary texts, and it requires continually to be read and re-read, and to be translated.

17. Ralph Waldo Emerson, *The Essential Writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson*. ed. Brooks Atkinson (New York: The Modern Library, 2000), 214.

18. Quoted in Cavell, *The Senses of Walden*, 54.

19. Cavell, *Contesting Tears: The Hollywood Melodrama of the Unknown Woman* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1996), 212.