

Kakinuma, Toshie: «Jōji Yuasa and the Apparatus Called Language», in: *Ongaku Geijutsu*, Issue 12, December 1984, pp 96–101.

Abstract Part III

The final part of Toshie Kakinuma's "Yūji Yuasa and the Apparatus Called Language" examines Yuasa's later vocal works – Projection on Bashō's Haiku (1974), Projection on Onomatopoeia (1979), and Etude for "The" (1983). Kakinuma shows how Yuasa's exploration of sound and meaning evolves into a deep engagement with the Japanese language itself: its phonetic energy, gestural character, and cultural resonance. Through these works, Yuasa transforms language into a field of play between voice and self, communication and noncommunication. His music thus reveals the voice as an apparatus mediating between individuality, collectivity, and the poetic essence of Japanese sound.

Yuasa Jōji's first work for voice was the musique concrète piece *Aoi no Ue* (1961),¹ based on a paraphrased [*Noh*] text, as already mentioned. The fact that this work – constructed from the voices of three Noh performers, Kanze Hisao, Kanze Hideo, and Kanze Shizuo – raised issues concerning traditional Japanese language and vocalization² cannot be overlooked, for the following year he completed *Bashō no haiku ni yoru Projectshon [Projection on Bashō's Haiku]*³ (1974) after *Yobikawashi [Calling to Each Other]* (1973).⁴

From *Voices Coming [Boisesu Kamīngu]* to *Yobikawashi*, the language used had consistently been contemporary Japanese. Why then, at this point, was it necessary to employ a traditional text – haiku – and a traditional vocal technique, the chant [*utai*]⁵?

*Projection on Bashō's Haiku*⁶ composed in 1974 for mixed chorus and vibraphone and premiered the same year by the Tokyo Philharmonic Chorus, the work sets ten haiku by Matsuo Bashō:⁷

1. *Nozarashi o kokoro ni kaze no shimu mi kana*
[Bleached bones on a moor – wind pierces my heart and body.]
2. *Inochi futatsu no naka ni ikitaru sakura kana*
[Within two lives – how the cherry blossoms live!]
3. *Yoru urani mushi wa gekka no kuri o ugatsu*
[At night the insect gnaws a chestnut under the moon.]

¹ Jōji Yuasa: *Aoi no Ue*, Electronic Music, tape, [27'], 1961, see also footnote 8) Part II

² Noh vocality [*kyōkyokuteki hatsusei*]: Yuasa's reference to Noh derives from his early exposure to the Kanze school's chant aesthetics, emphasizing breath, timbre, and bodily gesture rather than melodic contour.

³ Jōji Yuasa: *Projection on Bashō's Haiku*, for mixed chorus and vibraphone [14'], 1974, see footnote 12) Part II

⁴ Jōji Yuasa: *Calling Together*, for mixed voices, [10'-20'], 1973, see footnote 11) Part II

⁵ Noh terminology – *Utai [chant]* is the vocal performance style of Noh.

⁶ Yuasa: *Projection on Bashō's Haiku*, for mixed choir and vibraphone, 1974.

⁷ Matsuo Bashō (1644–1694), famous poet Japanese poet of the Edo period.

4. *Umi kurete kamo no koe honoka ni shiroshi*
[The sea darkens; the call of ducks faintly white.]
5. *Yama mo niwa mo ugokiiru ya natsu zashiki*
[The mountains and garden stir – summer parlor.]
6. *Aka-aka to hi wa tsurenaku mo aki no kaze*
[Bright, bright – the sun, and even the god’s face meets the autumn wind.]
7. *Tsuki hayashi kozue wa ame o mochinagara*
[The moon swiftly moves, and treetops hold rain.]
8. *Kareeda ni karasu no tomarikeri aki no kure*
[On a withered branch a crow perches – autumn dusk.]
9. *Fuyu no hi ya bajō ni kōru kagebōshi*
[Winter day – my shadow freezes in the saddle.]
10. *Tabi ni yande yume wa kareno o kakemeguru*
[Sick on a journey – my dream runs about the withered fields.]

The reason for choosing haiku as text can be understood from the composer’s own words: “The problem of the Japanese language, which supports almost all of the Japanese people’s sensitivity and logic – and here, haiku, from the perspective of such linguistic sensibility [*genko-teki kansei*], which, in other words, may also be called a way of perceiving the world [*sekai no ninshiki sayō*].”

Generally, even within the short-poetic forms of Japanese literature, *waka*⁸ centers on the verbal expression of emotion through predicate constructions, whereas *haiku* achieves its effect through the omission and condensation of verbs, creating an aftertaste or reverberation [*yoin*]. In other words, *waka*, which emphasizes lyricism [*jōjōsei*], is strongly oriented toward the signified [*shīgnifiē*], while *haiku*, relying on the rhythm and sharpness of language, possesses a high degree of autonomy in the signifier [*signifiant*].⁹

What Yuasa calls “the condensed essence” [*gyōshuku sareta essensu*] refers precisely to this semiotic function [*kigōka sayō*] of haiku. That was one of the composer’s perspectives in contemplating the vast domain of the Japanese language [*Nihongo to iu kōdaina ryōya*]. – page 96 –

⁸ Waka refers to classical Japanese poetry written in the native language, as opposed to kanshi composed in Chinese. The most common form of waka is the tanka, consisting of 31 syllables in a 5–7–5–7–7 pattern.

Originating in the Nara and Heian periods, waka embodies the Japanese ideal of subtle emotional expression through sound and rhythm, a sensibility that informs Yuasa’s exploration of language = voice in his compositions.
⁹ Kakinuma’s opposition signified [*shīgnifiē*] vs. signifier [*shīgnifiān*] alludes to Saussurean linguistics and semiology. Ferdinand de Saussure (1857 – 1913), the Swiss linguist regarded as the founder of modern structural linguistics, distinguished between signifiant (the “signifier”) and signifié (the “signified”). In his model of the linguistic sign, the signifiant is the sound-image or phonetic form of a word, while the signifié is the mental concept it evokes. The relationship between the two is arbitrary and conventional rather than natural, a principle that became foundational for later structuralist and semiotic theory.

The composer further remarked as follows: “We needed to think about Japanese pronunciation [*hatsuon*], vocalization [*hassei*], and musical gesture [*ongakuteki miburi*] within the two traditions that we possess – those of the West and of Japan. And, so to speak, at the level prior to music itself, the very act of utterance = pronunciation = speech [*hassei = hatsuon = hatsugo*] determines the dynamism of music created through the Japanese language. At that point, I wanted to make the Japanese language exist as Japanese.”

In the first piece of *Projection on Bashō's Haiku*, a Noh-chant-like vocalization [*yōkyoku-teki hassei*] appears with solemn gravity. We also find the treatment of high female voices as sonorous material [*onkyo-ka sareta koe*] and the technique of stretching decomposed phonemes [*bunkai sareta onso*], but what is heard here is a world of Noh chant. The linguistic sensibility that reads “nozarashi o” not by taking it digitally as “no-za-ra-shi-o,” but as a corporeal, gestural voice [*shintai-teki koe*] with gesture [*miburi*] – “n-no-o-za-a-ra-shi-i-u o” – is precisely united with the intention to make Japanese exist as Japanese. In the second piece too, the predominance of the vowel “i” is taken as an expressive feature of Japanese phonology [*nippon-go no on'in no hyōjō*], through the deformation [*defoorume*] produced by its emphasis and ornamental tones.

Even within a similar Noh-chant-like vocalization, the fifth section reveals a greater concern for acoustic design [*onkyo-teki hairyo*]. The overlapping surges of voices build up to form a single sonic shape [*onkyo no fōrumu*]. In the third and eighth piece words are decomposed into phonemes [*onso ni bunkai sare*], and distributed in a pointillistic manner across space. The beauty of the vocal timbre accompanied by the vibraphone is remarkable. In the tenth piece, each initial tone is varied in intensity [*kyōjaku no henka*] and repeats glissandi [*unari = wavering pitch*]. The masses of sound tense between convergence and diffusion [*shūren to kakusan no aida de kinchō suru*]. That is to say, here one discovers the natural and intimate cooperation between Japanese vocal articulation and the motion of sound [*oto no undō-sei*]. The voice chooses the word, and the word demands the gesture of the voice. Within this we find, from *Voices Coming to Calling Together*, a sustained meditation on the origins of language – the form and temporality of words and the abstraction and concreteness of words are brilliantly projected. At the same time, the core related to the constitution of the Japanese language [*nihongo no seiritsu ni kakawaru*] is laid bare.

This work bears the title “Projection,” a title the composer has often used in his own works: *Projection for Seven Performers* (1955), *Projection Topologic* (1959), *Projection Esemplastic*

(1961/64), *Projection for Koto and Orchestra – Kachō Fūgetsu* (1967), *Music for Space Projection* (1970), and *Projection for String Quartet* (1970). The Projection series is often described as “music of projection of existence” [*sonzai no tōki (projet) no ongaku*], and this work, too, belongs to that lineage. For the composer, who considers vocalization “the proof of human existence” the act of uttering language – consciously perceived as “Japanese” – is itself an act of verifying existence [*sonzai no kakunin*].¹⁰

What must be noted here, however, is that – as is often said concerning the *Projection series* – this work (and the *Projection Using Onomatopoeia* written next) is, rather than a music of the individual in the first-person singular, a music of the first-person plural. Here, the one who utters Japanese is not the ‘I’ as an individual but ‘multiple I’s.’ The individual Bashō, and likewise the subject Jōji Yuasa, are, in this context, penetrated by the consciousness of the linguistic community whose native language is Japanese. *Haiku*, as a play of *signifiers*, exists not so much as a self-expression of the speaking subject, but rather as an efflorescence of a linguistic sensibility supported by a collective – or even impersonal – consciousness. The verification of existence carried out through the act of vocalization is to be considered less through the logic of the individual than through the logic of the community. The reason I attempt to regard Yuasa Jōji’s vocal *Projections* as occupying a different phase than the other works of the *Projection series* lies precisely here.

Another work bearing the name *Projection, Projection Using Onomatopoeia*, is a composition that focuses on the special kind of language constituted by onomatopoeia [*giseigo, giongo, gitaigo*].

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Generally speaking, the connection between the *signifier* and the *signified* in language is said to be arbitrary; yet the peculiarity of onomatopoeia [*onomatope*] lies precisely in the fact that this link is not entirely arbitrary. For instance, in several languages the cry of a chicken is commonly represented by the sound [*kok*], a rhythm marked by the characteristic buoyancy of a bird’s call. Although such onomatopoeic forms indicate a relation to the actual sound = natural acoustic phenomenon of a chicken’s voice, they are at the same time unmistakably linguistic. They are

¹⁰ Projection series: these titles echo Sartre’s existential notion of *projet*, positioning sound as an act of being-in-the-world. In Jean-Paul Sartre’s existential philosophy, the term “project” (*projet*) refers to the fundamental way in which human existence is oriented toward the future. For Sartre, every individual is a being who *projects* themselves through choices – existence precedes essence, and a person’s identity is constituted by their ongoing, self-chosen projects. The *project* thus expresses freedom and intentionality: life is not determined by fixed nature but continually created through acts of commitment and decision.

language itself, filtered through culture and transformed into an artifact. “Koke-kokkō” is the representation of a chicken’s cry as heard through Japanese ears; it is a linguistic expression within the very system of the Japanese language. Onomatopoeia thus occupies a singular position – retaining the residue of natural sound while being integrated into culture. Because of this dual nature, onomatopoeia revitalizes both language and culture.

It is often said that Japanese possesses the richest store of onomatopoeia among all languages, and in this work that abundance of material is fully exploited. Onomatopoeic words, which can be traced back to ancient times, have enriched Japanese linguistic activity through rhythms endowed with acoustic beauty and expressivity, and through gestures that fuse with movement. For example, the *Kojiki* [*Records of Ancient Matters*]¹¹ records onomatopoeic words such as “koworokoworo” and “moyura-moyura.” Even in haiku, a highly constrained poetic form, they provide gestures and nuances that no other word can replace.

Haru no umi / shujitsu no-tari no-tari kana
 Muraga-ka ni / notto hi no deru yamaji kana Bashō
*[From the village’s fragrance, the sun rises upon the mountain path
 Spring sea – the whole day long, waves gently rolling]*

In both daily speech and in poetry or prose, onomatopoeia is used only in fragments, and precisely for that reason it yields particularly effective expression. In the literature of Mori Ōgai¹² and Mishima Yukio,¹³ for instance, onomatopoeia is said to be used sparingly yet with deliberate and artful placement.

In music too, the partial insertion of onomatopoeia has produced works imbued with rhythmic color that cannot be achieved by instrumental sound alone. Olivier Messiaen’s *Cinque Rechants* (*Cinq Rechants*, 1948) alternates unison *rechants* and polyphonic *couplets*. While the couplets are melodic, the rechants rhythmically sing onomatopoeic syllables such as “tktktk” and “hahaha.” Needless to say, these onomatopoeias make the contrast even more vivid.

Yuasa, however, deliberately covers the entire surface of this composition with onomatopoeia. The work as a whole may be divided into parts centered on acoustic construction [*onkō-teki*

¹¹ The *Kojiki*, compiled in 712 CE, is Japan’s oldest chronicle, foundational text of Shintō mythology.

¹² Mori Ōgai (1862–1922), Japanese author, translator, and physician, leading figures of Meiji-period literature.

¹³ Mishima Yukio (1925–1970), novelist, playwright, and essayist, most internationally known postwar writer.

kōsei] and parts constructed primarily through gesture and expression [*miburi ya hyōjō wo shutai to shita kōsei*]. In the acoustic sections, words of similar timbre and rhythm are grouped together and treated collectively, yet they are not necessarily linked to any specific image or gesture. For example, combinations such as *gossori*, *kotteri*, *sappari*, *sukkiri*, *ukkari*, *dokkiri* are associative and playful. Elsewhere, words of differing timbres are struck together simultaneously to yield an ambiguous, chaotic expression. In the gestural and expressive sections, by contrast, techniques such as the slight shifting and layering of identical words expose rather distinct images. The scene where the sound *sawa-sawa* passes gradually through twelve choral parts from soprano to bass evokes, as an image, the rustling of wind sweeping across a meadow.

If, however, the work consisted only of these descriptive sections that evoke specific images, it would likely have degenerated into a mere piece of sound effects. Conversely, had it focused solely on acoustic structure, the result would have lacked gesture and image – a balance that Yuasa consciously sustains.

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If onomatopoeia were to have a fixed meaning, there would be no point in using it. It is far more beautiful, Yuasa suggests, to attempt an *acoustic design* [*onkyo no dezain*] by decomposing language. This work, which employs onomatopoeia throughout, achieves the status of a complete composition because it structures a continuous oscillation between two elements – the sonic [*onkyō*] and the gestural [*miburi*] – that is, between parts so chaotic they cannot coalesce into a single image, and parts that are oriented toward a particular gesture and a clearly articulated image structure.

Yuasa writes of this work: “My relationship has deepened not only with language in general but with the Japanese language itself, *and with its roots* in Japanese tradition.”

As in *Projection on Bashō’s Haiku* the very fact that this piece bears the title *Projection* reveals an intention to move beyond earlier experimental attempts toward a high degree of compositional completion.

However, as already mentioned, although it too is titled *Projection* [Projection], here the meaning of “projection of existence [sonzai no tōki]” is attenuated. What remains is a sense of motion in the floating, severed *écriture* [ekurichūru]¹⁴, detached from the body [ashi o kiritorarete fuyū

¹⁴ The French term *écriture* literally means “writing,” but in critical theory it refers to writing as a metaphor for all systems of signification, not merely the act of putting words on paper. Derrida (1930–2004) used *écriture* to

suru]. Meaning is further reduced, while a space is formed through the interweaving of rhythm, gesture, and sound. It is a work unmistakably conceived in the awareness of the Japanese language. Precisely for that reason, Yuasa's approach presents a dimension decisively different from that of Western works dealing with the voice.

Composers such as Berio, Boulez, Stockhausen, and Ligeti, who have focused on the subdivision of language and the gestural qualities of speech, did so in opposition to the so-called Western *logocentrism* and *phonocentrism*.¹⁵ Within a Western culture that has long concealed silent *écriture* – pictographic or ideographic writing – behind phonetic script, such movements cannot be discussed on the same plane as the activity within Japanese culture, where *kanji* and their diverse calligraphic forms [*shotai*] constitute a fundamentally different conception of language. As we have already seen in works like *Ataransu [Genesis of Utterance]*, which are constructed solely from phonemes, the difference from Western works is evident. The Japanese linguistic sensibility accompanies even abstract operations and cannot be ignored in any process involving language. After a long series of experiments concerning the problems of language in general, Yuasa turned his attention toward the Japanese language itself is thus a fact of great significance. *Question [Toi]* can be performed in English, and *Yobikawashi (Call and Response)* is independent of any specific language, having already been performed in several languages.

Previously, Yuasa had maintained that one should transcend the limits of Japanese and hear words purely as sound [kotoba o oto jitai to shite kiku]. Yet in the two *Projections*, he opened a new path precisely by re-engaging the Japanese language. For the composer of Aoi no Ue, this development may, in fact, have been a long-prepared and inevitable process.

Jōji Yuasa's most recent work, *From the Etudes for "The": Weather Forecast Observations*,¹⁶ marks a turn away from the two *Projections* that dealt with the Japanese language, becoming

challenge logocentrism. In his view, *écriture* exposes the instability of meaning and the deferred nature of signification – every sign refers to other signs, never to a fixed origin.

¹⁵ *Logocentrism* denotes the philosophical privileging of rational meaning, presence, and the written or spoken *logos* ("word") as the foundation of truth. *Phonocentrism*, a subset of logocentrism identified by Jacques Derrida, refers specifically to the privileging of speech (voice, *phonē*) over writing, assuming that the voice provides direct access to thought or truth.

¹⁶ Jōji Yuasa: *Etude for "The" – Observation on Weather Forecast*, for baritone and trumpet, [8'], 1983, premiered: 1 June 1983, Tokyo by the performer group *THE*: Peter Larsen and Eric Harkins, *Etude for "The"* marks a sharp shift away from the two *Projections* that dealt with Japanese. It is an intermedia work employing an English text together with gesture. Conceived for the performer group *The* (Peter Larsen and Eric Harkins), the piece bears the subtitle *An Examination of the Meta-Message as Non-verbal Communication Contained in Verbal Activity*. Using the weather-forecast column of the Los Angeles Times as its text, the work

instead an intermedia work accompanied by an English text and gesture. Conceived for the group of two performers called “The,” consisting of P. Larsen and E. Harkins, this work bears the subtitle “A consideration of meta-messages as non-verbal communication contained within linguistic activity.” Taking the weather forecast column of the *Los Angeles Times* as its text, the work seeks to illuminate the problem of the discovery and reconfiguration of non-verbal – namely musical – meaning that inevitably emerges when the description of the objective facts known as a weather forecast is uttered and pronounced as one aspect of linguistic activity.

Goggles are devices that transform the performers into anonymous beings. In so-called ‘performance’ [*pāfōmansu*], it is not uncommon for impersonal props such as masks or puppets to be used, and the goggles here may be regarded as a kind of mask [*kamen*]. – page 99 –

The two performers read the weather forecast as if reciting poetry, sometimes sobbing, sometimes vocalizing as if singing an operatic aria, sometimes mixing in nervous laughter. Meanwhile, busy actions of sitting and standing on their chairs are incorporated, and their gestures, as if suspended in mid-air, seem to attest to the absence of communication.

Until now, the composer had never taken up the expressive nature of the voice – such as laughter or weeping – as a compositional problem. On the contrary, he had approached the problem of language precisely by avoiding such expressivity. The reason that in this work the crying and laughter are performed somewhat exaggeratedly is none other than that the composer consciously takes up the self-expressive quality of the voice [*koe no jikohyōshutsusei*]. Here, emotional expressive acts are intertwined with the non-expressive informational character of the weather-forecast text. The inconsistency between emotionally self-expressive vocalization and gesture, on the one hand, and the sentences that should be read in an impersonal, unemotional manner, on the other, is a deliberate recombination [*kumikae*] of the relationships among word, voice, and gesture.

Through the separation and displacement [*zure*] of these habitual, familiar combinations, the routinized language expression is relativized, turned into a routine work and linguistic

seeks to illuminate “the problem of discovering and reconstructing the non-verbal = musical meaning [*higengo-teki*] = *ongaku-teki imi*] that inevitably appears when an objective description of fact – such as a weather report – is uttered [*hatsusei sareru*] as part of verbal activity.” The two performers appear wearing ski goggles, sit on chairs, and begin their performance. The goggles veil their individuality, making them anonymous beings without personal identity [*mumei no ningen*].

communication itself is called into question. Yet this should not be read merely as a presentation of the non-communicativity [*hi-dendatsusei*] of language. Like *Yobikawashi*, another intermedia work that employs gesture, this piece attempts to communicate the very fact of non-communication. However, in the present work, that non-communicativity is already taken as a given – something already understood.

The rhythm of gesture, meticulously calculated and constructed in this work, often carries a touch of comedy. Yet this comic flavor in the performance does not lead to despair over non-communication; on the contrary, it seems to reveal an optimism – a delight in the very act of non-communication itself. In the final moment of the work, the words “see you tomorrow” are uttered; within them we can read an implicit promise to challenge this non-communication game once again tomorrow. Language sometimes functions not through the content of words but through the act of exchanging words itself—its phatic function [*kōwateki kinō*]. Similarly here, what matters is participation in the non-communication game itself.

Composer Jōji Yuasa is, so to speak, the instigator of this non-communication game. As in *Yobikawashi*, he conceals his presence, maintaining the position of the maker of a non-communication apparatus [*hi-dendatsu sōchi no seisakusha*].

In the process of manipulating language and relativizing linguistic relations, self-consciousness inevitably becomes conscious of itself. To question language is simultaneously to question self-consciousness. Language about language converges upon the verification of the alibi of the speaking subject. Conversely, awareness of self-consciousness functions as the causal force leading to the manipulation of language about language, to the creation of linguistic game-apparatus of non-communication [*hi-dendatsu no gengo gēmu sōchi*]. As we have seen, Yuasa Jōji was able to leave behind many works that question voice and language through voice and language themselves precisely because he continually faced himself, persistently re-examining his own self-consciousness in the course of creation.

Not only in his vocal works but in Yuasa Jōji’s oeuvre as a whole, an attachment to the “I” [*watashi e no kodawari*] can often be felt. Beyond the *Projection* series – so named in the sense of “projection of existence” – we can discover the same imprint. In *Chronoplastic for Orchestra*

[*Ōkesutora no tame no Kuronopurasutikku*],¹⁷ which concretizes the plasticity of time [*jikan no kasōsei*] and the dynamics of acoustic energy [*onkyo enerugī no dōtai*], it is not difficult to hear the inner time-consciousness of the individual, or the inner spatiality of the individual confronting the world. Within that, there is an attitude of striving to penetrate through by relativizing the “I” itself – approaching the “I” with a certain distance. – page 100 –

One can read in *Chronoplastic* the self-awareness of the “I” [*watashi*] emerging through the act of grasping sound. It might be said that this work establishes, as an acoustic perspective, the distance separating the self from the “I”.

Yuasa himself, looking back on his twenty-third year, wrote that “by becoming conscious of my ego in relation to the world, I became increasingly introspective.” Since then, this consciousness of ego has continued to flow at the foundation of his creative work – transformed, however, into a consciousness of self-consciousness [*jiga ishiki no ishiki*].

When Yuasa deals with language, self-consciousness is perhaps most radically relativized. Looking at the relationship between the composer and his vocal works, one can discern two tendencies in this relativization of the “I.” The first is the attitude of erasing the individual self [*ko*] in his role as maker of apparatus for voice and language; the second is the stance of ultimately leaving the author – oneself – remaining as one of the speaking subjects. *Voices Coming, Question, Call and Response*, and *Etude for “The” – Weather Forecast Observation*¹⁸ may be regarded as belonging to the first tendency, while *Ataransu, Projection on Bashō’s Haiku*, and *Projection on Onomatopoeia* belong to the latter.¹⁹

Between these two poles – between the negation and manifestation of self-awareness – the composer continues an unceasing oscillation. When the composer questions language in general,

¹⁷ Jōji Yuasa: *Chronoplastic for Orchestra – Between Stasis and Kinesis*, [13’], 1972.

¹⁸ See footnote 17)

¹⁹ Kakinuma’s discussion of *Projection on Bashō’s Haiku* and *Projection on Onomatopoeia* suggests that both works share a concern with collective linguistic expression rather than the utterance of an individual “I.” While Kakinuma does not explicitly elaborate on this distinction, her references to *fukusū ichininshō* [*plural first person*] and *genko kyōdōtai* [*linguistic community*] imply that Yuasa’s *Projections* articulate a *we* that speaks through language as a shared sensibility. The expansion above clarifies this underlying logic: that the voice in these works is not personal but communal, and that Yuasa’s treatment of onomatopoeia continues his exploration of how language and sound interpenetrate within a collective field of expression.

the shadow of authorship becomes faint, and self-awareness tends toward *muka* [nullification].²⁰ Conversely, when he perceives himself within tradition, as one who shares the Japanese language, the self manifests as one among a plurality of selves [*fukusū no watashi*].²¹ The ultimate core of *watashi* remains something the composer cannot but retain.

To question language is to question the self – it is to question self-consciousness itself. And for Yuasa, to question the self was to question language. The apparatus that produces words is a paradox of nullification that the very persistence of subjectivity [*shutai*] has brought forth. On the other hand, when subjectivity is pursued to its ultimate limit, what remains ineradicable is the awareness of the Japanese language itself.²² Within the tension of these opposing poles of personal consciousness unfolds an endless seesaw game – that, one may say, is the essence of Jōji Yuasa’s works for voice and language.

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(End)

Toshie Kakinuma – music critic

Editorial note:

This text is a transcription of the original Japanese article by Toshie Kakinuma and does not constitute a full translation. It was transcribed, rendered, and edited by Dorothea Schürch using Google Drive OCR, DeepL, and ChatGPT. Source: Toshie Kakinuma, “Jōji Yuasa and the Apparatus Called Language.

²⁰ Muka, a Buddhist-inflected philosophical notion of “nullification” or “non-being,”

²¹ Plural subjectivity: Kakinuma’s insight anticipates later theories of collective utterance and the social body of language, aligning with poststructuralist notions of distributed authorship.

²² Self and Language – throughout his oeuvre, Yuasa oscillates between two tendencies: (1) the effacement of the individual self, positioning himself as the maker of a linguistic-vocal apparatus (*Voices Coming, Question, Calling to Each Other, Etude for “The”*), and (2) the retention of self as speaking subject (*Atarans, Projection on Bashō’s Haiku, Projection on Onomatopoeia*).