

# ENGLISH CONVERSATION :

## OKU NO HOSOMICHI

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### Abstract

What is this stuff called *eikaiwa*, and what would it mean to practise something called English Conversation, or to *teach* it to anyone? If *eikaiwa* tends to lie beyond the Grammar-Translation-based methods, standards and tests at the heart of a traditional curriculum in *Eigo* (English language), and if it is also something other than the methods and techniques of what we call EFL; if indeed it's somewhat impervious to studies in Applied Linguistics, then perhaps it is well to consider it, as we do, in practice, in *Eikaiwa* schools. We characterize this practice, considering it as *hobby*, *shumi*, or *dô*. We follow *dô* (read as, for instance, *Tao*) in search of enlightenment, freedom. This, we agree, is of the essence for us as *eikaiwa no sensei*.

### Hanami, 2001

Perhaps, to many I passed in the streets every day, I was always coming from a foreign land, and never arriving in Japan. Nevertheless, I begin: It was late in the *hanami* season when I first arrived in Japan in 2001.

On the first day, I made my start by learning one word, having come to Japan without really knowing anything about the Japanese language, much less about people who spoke it. Having arrived on the last Shinkansen the night before, having then crashed in a little room in the Hotel Oahu, I was waiting, somewhat bedazzled in the April sunshine in front of the hotel, for a couple of outbound teachers from the school where I was to work. Sally and Gord. It was their last weekend in Akita. They pulled up with a friend, Yoshi, in his car, yelling out the window for all on that dappled sidewalk to hear: *Hey, gaijin!* This, they told me as I got in the car, meant *foreigner* or *outsider*. They were having a laugh. Though difficult to mark

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as really significant at the time, at least in Akita it would turn out to be a basic element in the consciousness of the foreign nationals I met, be they tourists, backpackers, Assistant Language Teachers, *eikaiwa* teachers, businesspeople, academics, expats, entertainers, whatever—they were all quite recognizable in the street, and all, knowingly, *gaijin*. I hopped in the car, and off we went to get set up for an evening *hanami* barbecue where local beef and beer would be enough to prompt the *oishii* remark which, I was informed, meant *delicious* (not that I'd heard this word in English, very often, since my childhood). The other word of that first day was *kawaii*: the women present wanted to make sure I understood that bit (meaning, they told me, *cute*) of their vocabulary. In the weeks and months to follow, the frequency of these terms, their cultural-hermeneutic saliency, quickly became apparent to me.

Watson (2008, p. 124) writes of teaching English in Japan as “not something I'd dreamed of doing but something to do while I dream, some way to make a living”. “I also wanted”, he maintains, “to look around Japan, absorb some of it, drink it in (literally and figuratively), learn something different, flirt with Zen, talk with people, check out the ladies, frolic in the neon nighttime establishments” (Watson, 2008, p. 124). Such, too, was my own frame of mind, to some extent, but I had to start by waking up in the morning, looking around the room, and saying to myself, *Right, I'm in Japan. Better watch out for the door-lintel as I go out to the kitchen for my morning coffee.* Every waking moment had become an adventure, had taken on a real uncertainty as to its outcome: I was in a place that had a different word for everything, or at any rate different uses and meanings for so many words that might otherwise be familiar—a phenomenon known as *false friends* in Applied Linguistics, but often called *Japanese English* in Japan. Even grocery shopping or using a machine to wash my clothes (both activities involving the interpretation of a great many signs: pictures, locations such as aisles in the market, trial and error—anything except the Japanese language written around me, to the point where an English word on a label or a button would jump right out at me, as from a kind of silence, and shout *look at me, use me, think about me*) became the kinds of tasks worthy of some really careful thought, and the co-ordination of a day's best efforts; getting on the right train or ordering a pizza would prove to be landmark accomplishments in a life where every day I tasted of such victory. Of course there were days when it seemed disappointing to catch the scent of adventure or comedy beyond my apartment door, only to wind up at the office for another day of enforced busyness, under constant scrutiny from the school manager, sitting with my colleagues in a cluster of desks arranged next to hers, ordered to fill in the time between classes by writing out scripted lesson plans—and such was the time-framework

within which my classes would fall during my time at Jack's : a rationalized, streamlined way of marking the time during which I was on the company dime. Punch in. Punch out. Go home at 9pm, after the last evening class. Breathe in. Breathe out. Begin again at noon the next day. I digress, perhaps, but always with an eye on the context, or perhaps the head-space, in which I had my first encounters with what's known as *eikaiwa*.

### **Eikaiwa**

Sometime in the first month, a new friend, a fellow Canadian named Jim, brought me to a place called, simply enough, The English Café. I remember the stained-wood interior, the Hawaiian bartender named Kirk and the Bass Pale Ale he was pouring—the first I'd had, thinking it was funny I'd have to go all the way to Japan for such an experience. Perhaps such a setting couldn't help me to believe it, but here I was, in the relatively small city of Aki-ta, capital of the Japan Sea-side prefecture of the same name, in the Tôhoku region of northern Honshu.

By this time, I'm sure, I'd heard the term *eikaiwa* (I was working for a place known as *Jack's Eikaiwa*), but when an older local man approached me at the bar to give me his business-card and say, *Please teach me English Conversation*, I felt hard-put to make out what he meant by thus framing things in English. The formal yet direct phrasing sounded foreign to me, although the words were quite simple and familiar. I could understand being asked to teach him English ; however, the seemingly extraneous *conversation* left me wondering if I was really understanding what I was hearing.

The man left directly after making his request. Mystified, I turned to the older and more experienced Jim, who explained that *English Conversation* was the going translation for *Eikaiwa*, and that *Eikaiwa* was also the Japanese equivalent of the English term *English as Foreign Language*. This was, he explained, a chance to practise autonomously, and it's what Jim himself had gradually come to do : building up a timetable of teaching engagements directly with those who were interested in what I would learn to call *private teaching*. Until then, I'd thought *eikaiwa* only meant *English school, as in Jack's English School*.

Here, in the proposed subject-matter of English Conversation, was a new piece of language which would, at least in this word *eikaiwa*, prove to come up often : jumping out of an overheard but otherwise comfortably unintelligible conversation taking place somewhere over my shoulder in the Café Christmas ; permeating, naturally, much of the actual conversation I had at Jack's. It seemed to be important to people, everywhere I went, or at any rate the sight

of me would seem to bring it up : *Oh, look, he must be an eikaiwa teacher ; have you ever tried eikaiwa ?* But I had reservations : Jim was explaining that the “lessons” would take place at my home or at my student’s home or, in the case at hand, probably right there at the English Café, meeting every week or so to share a beer and talk for awhile. Would *I* be able to teach in this manner ? For one thing, my contract with Jack’s would forbid me to teach anywhere except at Jack’s. I belonged to Jack’s, both on and off the clock, even in my sleep, as a condition for the very fact of being here in Japan. In a city the size of Akita I would have to worry about word getting back to my manager, and if that ever happened I could imagine losing my job—and then what would I do, being so new in this country, where I couldn’t even speak the language well enough to go job-hunting and Jack’s had even signed, as guarantor, the lease for my apartment. Besides, would this even be *teaching* ? Shouldn’t teaching happen in a classroom ?

To this day, *eikaiwa* nevertheless remains a mystery to me, except in its currency as the local name for the kind of English-teaching industry in which I was engaged. Still, I carry abundant stories of *eikaiwa*, and I mean to explore them now that I’m back in Canada for a time. This I will do, in part, as I keep in touch with my TGU colleague Scott Watson, signing his own name here as Zenmai : co-author of this text and more than half a lifetime resident in Japan. Following are letters representing our conversation. Mine are all signed by a C-Mac because this is a nickname proposed for me by Zenmai himself, some time ago. Maybe it will stick this time.

20 April 2009

Thank you, Dear Zenmai,

for agreeing to take up this conversation. Let me begin by asking you whether you would say that *eikaiwa* is a way of life, or a way of living in Japan,—or would you say that it’s just a Japanese way of distinguishing communicative (*kaiwa*-based) language instruction from the grammar-translation method which has prevailed for so long in the teaching of English (understood as *Eigo*, *English Language*) in Japan ?

A sense of mystification about *eikaiwa* is really my starting-point in this study. After working in it for over seven years, the first question I’ve raised for myself is *what is this stuff called eikaiwa?* Perhaps my question belies some sense of an ineffable, or unspeakable, mystery, since, if we can’t say what *eikaiwa* really means, then how can we teach it ? Conversely, if

we feel we know just what *eikaiwa* is, then where will we find the sense of mystery which also guides us? If it weren't an unspeakable secret to some teachers, that fundamentally, perhaps, their work as teachers is only meant, in the words of my American-born boss<sup>1</sup> at the franchised Blitz Language Centre, to consist in *conversating*<sup>2</sup> with Japanese people in English, then I suppose I shouldn't be surprised to look back and find that I've almost never had a really frank conversation with another teacher on this subject.

So it was about this time of year (and now eight years have passed) since I first arrived in Akita. I understand that the *hanami* season has come and gone already in Sendai for this year, but here in the farm's old orchard the lone little Japanese cherry tree is still only budding, the buds just now taking on a reddish hue, distinguishing themselves from the rest of the early growth. Looking forward to the blossoms, then, as also to your next letter, I remain, sincerely,

—C-Mac.

April 22

Hi C-Mac.

Yes, the notion of what, educationally, is supposed to be happening in those places called *eikaiwa* classrooms is vague. Then again, the concept of education is a vague one in itself if we try to extract it from the various agendas—religious, political, social, etc.—that use an instructional process of one sort or another in order to inculcate their particular programs in us.

If we take out that particular content of education what are we left with? A process? The verb *to learn*, or the verb *to teach*. Maybe combined into one word: *teachinglearning*. Two sides of one coin.

Looked at from another angle *eikaiwa* does seem to make sense, as much sense as anything that is done under the label *education* in a country such as America (which is used because of my firsthand experience of things in that country). It makes an economic sense because there is money to be made.

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<sup>1</sup> (but not my fellow *gaijin*, as he would have me know—because of his African heritage, I gathered)

<sup>2</sup> (whatever he meant by that, it came with his insistence that *even a monkey could do it*—and hence a rationalization for the wage at which he would pay those who were, very much, in his *employ*)

If we compare *eikaiwa*, through that dimension, we can connect it with how in some U.S. universities philosophy is no longer being offered. There's no money in it anymore. Times change. Vernacular literature, it used to be, was not deemed worthy of being in a university curriculum. Only Greek and Roman classics were good enough. Modern languages were not taught at all. This refers to 19th century America.

Now Greece and Rome are out, computers are in.

*Eikaiwa* is there because a market for it can be created. Same goes for everything else in the curriculum at a Japanese university. All of sudden *international* sprang up to describe new departments of study created at universities all over Japan. High schools too. It is all playing to the market. Attracting customers. It has little to do with whether there is anything at all international about the course of study. The idea is to attract the customers and then dish out whatever the masses will buy, and they, as my door-to-door sales boss told me long ago, will buy a bucket of manure if it's presented in the right way.

When did this madness begin? English education began when Japan was opened up by America the new colonial power. Perry and his black ships. There was an immediate need to converse with American diplomats such as Townsend Harris (John Wayne in *The Barbarian and the Geisha*). Training in spoken English began. When the actual term *eikaiwa* appears I do not know.

You share a surname with the fellow who may have been the first spoken English teacher in Japan. Ranald (not Ronald) MacDonald. He was from Washington State. Astoria is the name of the town. Named after an American millionaire, famous in the fur trade and seal massacre. A hotel in NYC with his name. Waldorf-Astoria: Is it still there?

He was part native American. Shipwrecked and floated to Japan on a giant chunk of tofu—*not*!

As to whether *eikaiwa* may be an open way of life, or a closed way of making a living in Japan, taking, here, the way, the path, whatever: the sense of it changes depending on where one is within society—or out of it, if possible. To me it is a way of life. *Shidō* was Bashō's

“way of poetry”, and with him it was trying to live a life that is genuine. Same with Santôka. Same with Cid Corman. To mention a few.

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Zenmai

24 April

Many thanks, Zenmai,  
for your thoughtful response. I read much in your letter that will most likely guide our discussion by the light of saying *eikaiwa* is like anything, really : like anything that may be bought or sold as educational content, educational product, in today’s marketplace. (The word commodity has found heavy use in such contexts, I note since returning to Canada—where, for example, our prime minister speaks of *natural commodities*. I wonder when we’ll begin speaking of *human commodities*.) Yet teaching and learning, you seem to say, may go on despite commercial appeal. So, at least as long as there’s money to be made in education *of whatever kind*, in Japan, there will be those teaching and learning *eikaiwa*.

It is interesting, I think, that you use the expression *two sides of one coin* to describe teaching and learning : two (opposite ?) signs of the value of what is exchanged. I think you’re right, at any rate, to equate the exchange of teaching and learning *eikaiwa* with the expressed and explicit value of being *international*.

I remember a student of mine, herself a teacher at a *yôchien*, using a sentence that surprised me. She suggested that I (who, when asked about my travels before reaching Japan, was relating that I had spent a year and a bit in France and Germany as a younger person, and was now, obviously, in Japan, and also representing Canada in some way) was really *international*. Images of Austin Powers came to mind : *International Man of Mystery*. Or of Stuyvesant cigarettes : *International Passport to Smoking Pleasure...With Miracle Filter !* Was I being seen as elegant, sophisticated, worldly ? Monied, educated, upwardly mobile ? A model citizen of the world, bringing all these qualities with me to those aspiring Japanese who would one day—what ? See me on the street and offer directions ? Come to learn from me in class ? In some ways I feel that by virtue of an imagined international citizenship, an imaginary that would come around us, or surround me like a kind of bubble, I was like a walking doorway in my Japanese life, or at any rate a window : people would walk by and seem to

take notice, as often seemed to be happening in conversations in class everyday—to take notice of the view or experience of the world *beyond* Japanese shores, the view to which they might have supposed I could bring them ; something which, just by the looks of me, of me there, being *gaijin*, I could easily afford.<sup>3</sup>

A sense of the international, of the ability to speak English and to make connections and even friendships in other countries,<sup>4</sup> is also more or less explicitly behind the Japan Exchange and Teaching Programme. This is the biggest teaching-exchange programme in the world today, developed in Japan during the years of the bubble economy. Andorf's "Half In, Half Out" reflections, in a book on JET called *Getting Both Feet Wet*, summarizes the programme's mandate. It lies, she says, with the impressions formed in the schoolchildren who meet foreign teachers : "that Japan will become more outward-looking with time" and that Japanese people might become less "ignorant of people and cultures outside Japan". Andorf makes the very good point, at length of her reckoning of what it means to be international, that "prejudice is not only a Japanese vice"—though it may seem to be so, at face value, in the discourse of those who go to teach in Japan and who may at times feel so much like *gaijin* that they will commit the fallacy of concluding that a group whom we may identify as the Japanese are "prejudiced" in the sense of ethnocentric. The terms of Andorf's analysis surprise and comfort me most of all in their frank acknowledgement of everyday concerns in her professional discourse.

Such an address to the problem of prejudice may well be the full reach of the touted international perspective in a Japanese cultural context, and yet, you're right, it is a key selling-point for *eikaiwa*. The teacher, being a *native speaker*, may encounter being set aside for a particular vocation in really existential terms. For some there is a missionary zeal about teaching EFL which I think stems from such an emotional grounding. I also think it's worth noting that, where I came in as a Specialist in Humanities, there were many who'd arrived on Missionary visas. You know, I was surprised to find that I could count on being greeted in the street, in English, by young members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, al-

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<sup>3</sup> Herewith, a little dialogue for discussion in class :

A : *So you're teaching English in Japan, eh ? What's that like ?*

B : *Well, it beats working !*

<sup>4</sup> This has perhaps been rendered in more current English as *cosmopolitan*—see, notably, Pinar's recent book, *The Worldliness of a Cosmopolitan Education*, and its reception in the field of curriculum studies.



ways recognizable with their young and close-shaven faces, their white bicycle helmets and of course the white shirts and ties. Apparently they, too, would offer *eikaiwa* sessions, at no cost to those who didn't mind discussing their religion. But I felt that this, like the JET experience, was really beyond my ken as *eikaiwa* teacher : I'd be more like the guy who officiates at "Western-style" weddings, the ones in the chapels you find everywhere in Japan, with their fanciful architecture. Given enough proficiency to handle the parts of the service that were in Japanese, a man could make a good bit of extra cash in this way. I've heard rumours of aspiring novelists who would only do this sort of work, filling up their weekends with wedding gigs, and making enough to keep themselves going through the writing week. I wonder if anyone has yet written a novel that deals with that experience. Anyway, this wouldn't be for me, anymore than the modelling I was once asked if I'd like to do (*ha !*), since it would take up my precious weekends. Learning to speak Japanese and learning to love the weekends became one and the same change in my consciousness : if this was a difficult change, then it was difficult because such a majority of my time was spent in the context of my English-speaking apartment or my English-speaking offices. Again, here is the bubble, the doorway, the window.

26 April

I've just watched *The Barbarian and the Geisha*, the John Wayne movie you mentioned. I am aware, by the way, of the *sonnō jōi* drive behind the Meiji Restoration, which envisaged, in reaction to the advent of (John Wayne as) Townsend Harris and others, not only *revering the emperor* but also *expelling the barbarians* ; I wonder if such talk would have directly informed the choice of title for this movie.

I smiled when Harris looked at the *rundown* house he'd been given as first Consul General, on behalf of the US, at Shimoda—he looked around and said *home ; sweet home*. Later in the movie, his appeal to the shogunate, reaching out a neighbourly hand and stressing the common good, is practically a comical image to bear in mind as I also accept your invitation to see in it "America the new colonial power". Such, perhaps, is the kind of Americanization portrayed as the way of progress for Japan ; I stress that this movie was made in 1958, at length of an American-led occupation under MacArthur (the first foreign occupation in Japanese history, and one during which the emperor himself was forced to renounce the divine status into which mythology had borne him and all of those ancestors of whom the legends spoke, all the way

back to Izanami and Izanagi) and a Korean War in which Japan had been used as a strategic launching-pad.

Let's go back to somewhere near your own origins, shall, we? Those you describe may be some of your earliest recollections of names associated with a (pre) history of *eikaiwa*. You begin with the Waldorf-Astoria hotel, in New York. There is also a community in Queen's, apparently, called Astoria; like the hotel, it owes its name to the Astor family.

Old John Jacob Astor himself, America's first multi-millionaire, trading in furs, land and opium, established a fort in Oregon in 1810, a few years after Lewis and Clark had spent a winter waiting near the same place, hoping that a ship would come and bring them back to the east.

Fort Astoria was then, you say, the birthplace of Ranald MacDonald (yes, a retrospective namesake of sorts), who is now remembered as the first teacher of English in Japan. Born of a Scottish fur-trader with Hudson Bay and of a member of the Chinook people, the boy MacDonald chanced to meet the shipwrecked Otokichi and a couple of other Japanese sailors, who seem to have left with him the impression that the aboriginal side of his heritage had its own origin and heritage, going way back, possibly to Japan. In 1848, MacDonald got dropped off by an American whaling ship, pretended to be shipwrecked on the small island of Rishiri, off Hokkaido; was captured by Ainu people, handed over to the Daimyo, and remanded to the Dutch of Dejima, near Nagasaki, who were at that time the only permitted operators of western trade with Japan;<sup>5</sup> he stayed for some ten months, and taught English to fourteen samurai, including Einosuke Moriyama, the renowned student of Dutch and English languages who would go on to negotiate, with others including Admiral Perry, the opening of Japan to the western world.

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<sup>5</sup> You know, there's a great passage in *Gulliver's Travels*, near the end of the third voyage (to Laputa, Balnibarbi, Luggnagg, Glubbdubdrib—and *Japan*). Arriving in Japan on the way home to England, he claims that he's Dutch but refuses to trample the crucifix in what would be taken as token of a non-Christian faith. The Emperor to whom Gulliver claims to have been speaking  
 seemed a little surprised; and said, he believed I was the first of my Countrymen who  
 ever made any Scruple in this Point; and that he began to doubt whether I were a real  
*Hollander* or no, but rather suspected I must be a Christian. (Swift, 1726/1920, p. 186)

Perhaps it's no wonder the protestant Dutch should have been the only western nationality tolerated as trading partners (apparently in numbers limited to the dozens, and only on Dejima) during the era of *sakoku* (*secluded country*) policy. Apparently the English could also have been contenders (other countries capable of this trade, like Portugal, being Roman Catholic), but the Dutch had convinced the shogunate that England was indeed a catholic country.

Jump just a couple of years from that forced opening by the black warships in Perry's command, and we're back at the arrival of Townsend Harris, the barbarian whose geisha, Okichi, is also much storied. If you go to Shimoda today, apparently you can find a temple-museum commemorating her times with Harris. Of course the movie told me nothing of this, but the story goes that Okichi's true love lived between her and a man named Tsurumatsu, that she was separated from him *for the good of Japan* when Harris arrived in need of a maid, that the lovers were reunited after his departure and until Tsurumatsu's untimely death, which preceded Okichi's by just a few years (they say that in her last days she was pretty much overtaken with the drink, and that she finally drowned herself in a river).

The rest, I suppose we may say, is history : a history of *eikaiwa*. Looking forward to your next letter,

—C-Mac.

### Shumi

One of the groups I taught in my last couple of years before leaving Sendai was an extraordinarily *genki* group of seniors who called themselves the Bushi. We'd meet at the local community centre in the Wakabayashi ward of the city. I didn't see them more than once every couple of months at first, and it seemed difficult, spending a couple of hours amongst these chatty people, to keep the dialogue from slipping, sometimes at great length, into Japanese. To feel like a really effective EFL teacher seemed practically out of the question. Interestingly, perhaps, Andorf's (2002, p. 162) reading of the local *matsuri* (*festivals*) she attended hinges on observing her students *outside* of their classrooms, as participants in wider town events ; for me, I think, the Bushi were themselves a town event. One Saturday morning they treated me to a dialogue in which we discovered the following.

*Eikaiwa* has its place amongst more or less widely recognized and accepted Japanese hobbies, or *shumi*. Many of the same people who practise *eikaiwa* have also practised more traditional Japanese disciplines like the tea ceremony, ikebana, or *shodô*. I feel, however, that when karate and other martial arts, just as well as fly-fishing, can clearly be seen on the same continuum of traditions old and new, the English word *hobby* fails to accurately portray the character of these free-time occupations, which are understood to be windows upon ways of the soul for those who engage in them. Indeed, such devotion to one art (there is probably a sense in which there can be only one in anybody's life), one activity in which the participant

may become a master, remains central to Japanese recreational life and is a unique concept when compared to the usual sense of *hobby*.<sup>6</sup>

Watson (2008, p. 108) defines the “conversational school” as “a for-profit entity that employs teachers of spoken English, teachers who had come mostly from English-speaking countries”. *Eikaiwa*, he says, is “‘real’, practical English, aimed at practical communication” as distinct from (even imagined as opposite to) a textbook’s “*John hit the ball into the woods and no one was able to find it*” (Watson, 2008, p. 129). The certified EFL teacher, however, full of buzzwords on teaching techniques, would find her career run ashore on this rocky coast if she did not lower the sail of “intellectual imperialism : one mode of knowing and living spread over the earth” (Watson, 2008, p. 113). Such a teacher will often find herself radically modulating, theories of teaching designed with English-speaking societal contexts in mind ; hopefully this is a process which leads to a deeper and more personal sense of what it means to be teacher or, as she will so often be addressed, *sensei*. There is a strong sense in EFL today, I think, that almost anything is to be preferred to the old grammar-translation methods for learning a language. If the *eikaiwa* classroom is supposed to contrast with what are widely characterized as outdated grammar-translation-based teaching methods in middle and secondary schools, then perhaps *eikaiwa* really could be almost anything : hobby to some, *shumi* to others, and so on.

Coming back to the topic of *shumi*, but still walking the road with Watson, the *eikaiwa no sensei* is likely to find that what *eikaiwa* students really want is novelty, and not necessarily novelty in styles of learning or some other element of *tekhne* in Applied Linguistics : simple diversion ; perhaps an entertaining insight on her life in their country (the pronouns are weighted here to suggest the kind of division many teachers experience when looked upon as native-speaking edutainers utterly dependent on their contracting companies) ; perhaps a bit of an escape from busy (and, one might assume, boring) Japanese lives ; a sense, perhaps, of liberation ; or a way of keeping active, of studying something, polishing and improving, gaining merit. This seems to be where my Bushi group would come in, to deliver the narrative of the *shumi*, and it’s where Watson goes next as well, noting especially that he, too, was there for

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<sup>6</sup> **hobby**

like *Dobbin*, a nickname for *Robin* (in turn, a nickname for *Robert*) ;  
 a nickname, then for a nickname for a Christian name ;  
 also often taken as a name for a toy horse, a *hobby horse*, made from a stick ;  
*Dobbin*, meanwhile, was used as a nickname for a real horse, on a farm) ;  
 ground for speculation to the effect that Anglo-Saxons have never really had *shumi* ;  
*not real, not work* and perhaps just a *passing interest*

diversion, as perhaps many would like to be anywhere.<sup>7</sup> “There we were”, says Watson :

housewives young, middle age, or older, retired businessmen, grandmothers and grandfathers, a college kid here and there, a few college professors. Some actually did have some degree of interest in English and pursued English study as they would another hobby. Some were there after having taken ceramics for a few years or had been in water colors before ; then on to conversational English. What was frustratingly obvious to me is that few of those who came to my classes were willing to put forth the effort needed—and it is a significant effort—to attain fluency or anything like it. (Watson, 2008, pp. 120-121)

Ultimately, the question may be this : *If we're not going to try to be good at it then what are we doing ?* “How can there be standards determining our curriculum”, I ask with Block (1998, p. 18), “when we don’t even know the situation to which those standards must answer” ? When, where, will our students be called on to have a conversation in English ? “For what am I preparing whom” (Block, 1998, p. 18) ? Perhaps the discourse of *shumi* lays all of these questions aside, provides another approach to discipline, to mastery, which may be measured not by performance standards but by degree of engagement, so that in order to become a master, you must choose a way of mastery. In practising one *shumi*, even once a week, one hopes to at least feel close to something beyond the demands of everyday life, and in that way learn or achieve something. But if *eikaiwa* is *shumi*, we need to draw a clear line between this kind of discipline and the hard work it takes to master a foreign language.

April 23

Dear C-Mac.

In the calligraphy classes, the formal tea etc., it is rare to see someone who is really being transformed or changed by being on a particular path. To persevere seems to be the ticket for these folks. They continue at these once a week sessions for ten years and more and become *veterans*.

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<sup>7</sup> Is *eikaiwa* teaching a kind of professional diversion ? I remember thinking, as a new teacher, that it was something I could just try out for awhile. I was rather non-committal in my first year or so, and especially about this vague stuff called *eikaiwa*. When my one-year contract came up for renewal for the first time, I moved up to Sendai to see what I could learn by working in a larger school. This wish, to learn more about teaching, kept me exploring *eikaiwa* longer than many whom I saw come and go. It wasn’t until I was beginning to feel that I had to some extent internalized *eikaiwa*, worked it into my dialogue in some way, that I could feel at home and enjoy, not *working* as a teacher (for a boss, sometimes so many bosses it was just confusing, who might have this or that idea of *eikaiwa*), but *playing* as one. My understanding of *eikaiwa* was thus something to do as I dreamt, a way of dreaming up a living as I went along—a way, a life, in/to the country of my choice.

I see this at the yoga classes I used to attend. Ones who have been there under the same instructor for years and years. They still haven't mastered most of the poses because they don't do Hatha Yoga every day like one is supposed to, but they accumulate merit simply by persevering, by going to these classes regularly, or sometimes not very regularly, even though they are not receiving the physical or spiritual benefits it is claimed yoga offers (some of which, such as increased energy, I can personally attest to).

When yoga class is over they continue on as ever, as good consumer-citizens without any indication of any *praxis* that may have been inspired by their doing yoga. They don't even try vegetarianism (which is non-violence in yoga thinking) or charity or anything else.

I know this from observation. We, when I was going, would give one of our neighbors a ride. Each time she would run her mouth constantly and her talk gave evidence of a closed and sealed middle class mentality. After three years of listening to her there was no sign of any opening, any breaking out of that mindset.

The people who come to these *eikaiwa* schools are basically looking to fill up their time. Those who seriously want to learn a language would not enroll in these commercial conversation schools. There are exceptions though, and there are seriously motivated individuals who turn up from time to time.

As you have said somewhere in your writing (I think it was you who said it, or was it me?) *eikaiwa* classes have their good points. Friendships can be made. You can see the others and know the others as individuals—not just objects a package of knowledge is directed at. Whether that qualifies as a *dō* (道) or not I can't say. But it balances the outright crass materialism that haunts those schools.

It might be claimed that middle class lifestyle is a way of life. The way of the world. It is, but this isn't what we mean when we use the *dō* word. We mean something that will take us deeper, beyond, something fecund that will be our living a life that is genuine.

薇

Zenmai

28 April

Dear Zenmai,

you bring up your yoga classes, as something you used to do, and I guess I hadn't realized that you'd already parted with this activity. I remember, some time ago, you reported your disgust at the fact that the instructor was driving a Mercedes or something—a testament, as you saw it, to the money-grubbing which seems to go along with so much teaching and learning, even in yoga. You're quite right, I think, to highlight the once-weekly basis of the classes—it is, of course, basically the same with most *eikaiwa* classes, and the attendant problem is naturally the same as well : nobody is likely to become a master of any kind by practising an hour or so in a week.

Rather than *master*, then, we must say *veteran* when we speak of *shumi*, though I am aware that in ikebana or calligraphy certificates and licenses are issued, whereby, after years of practice and in recognition of mastery, a student may become a teacher. Yet whether this is also a path of personal transformation, a way of the soul, seems unlikely in your view. And actually, I'm a little surprised at this.

There may be, in any class of the sort we are discussing, the few who would respond with something more than mere perseverance. You, for example, took up yoga and seem to have pressed on beyond the weekly classes, to mostly dispense with the classes themselves and towards benefits like increased energy ; you didn't just become a veteran, you became a vegetarian. This, to you, is the *praxis* of yoga beyond the four walls, the fenced-in space, of an hour-long meeting. It is *the disciplined search in which you engage freely with the terms of your own existence*. To the relentlessly bourgeois neighbour who rode with you to the classes, the possibility of such thorough praxis wouldn't matter a bit—at this rate, her (rather narrow, as you seem to represent it) mindset was under no threat whatsoever, and whatever concern she may have expressed for the practice of yoga could no doubt have been reduced at a moment's notice to a passing interest, a commodified object—a toy, really, a hobby (horse).

Perhaps, then, I'm concerned with the few to whom *eikaiwa* is that more complete praxis : a concern tending to desire; an intention, a *dô* that leads out from the limits of concern for mere *shumi*. Here you seem to emphasize that the *eikaiwa* classroom is, perhaps for most who enter it, simply the kind of place to spend free time, taking an interest in something, which I think we tend to mean when we say, in English, that *everyone needs a hobby*.

To put what we do as somehow, hopefully (or at least according to what we could call our best intentions), over against this sort of materialism (against this essentially thoughtless, passive, even unintentional consumption of cultural commodities, of commodified culture), there are the good points on which you and I, as *eikaiwa no sensei*, agree: *eikaiwa* is, for some at least, a way of friendship, a way of seeing and knowing others as actual human beings and not just as faceless holders of accounts to which you and I, according to Freire's well-known banking analogy, are supposed to transfer the funds of English—to “deliver the product”,<sup>8</sup> as my Blitz training so memorably phrased it. Perhaps it's telling that Andorf, the *hafu*<sup>9</sup> JET to whom I referred in my letter of last Friday, had to look outside of her public-school classroom in order to see her students as members of the community, to feel herself a member of the same community.

As you know, one of my teaching engagements in Sendai, and one of the places where I felt most at home as *eikaiwa no sensei*, working always with just a few people (maximum of six to a group, just a couple of groups in a week), was at the Uncle-building community center operated by a company that actually called itself Culture, Inc. I smile to remember this one.

The usual sense of *culture* as used amongst Japanese learners of English seems to refer (imagined in the interlanguage of many as if it were, in English, a countable noun) first of all to the specific actions which may be taken as appropriate to a (general) societal context. You might hear that a student wants to know more about American *cultures* like shaking hands, eating junk food or wearing sunglasses a lot.<sup>10</sup> I suppose these actions would be referred to as *bunka* in Japanese, but in English I feel they are more specifically like what Peter McLaren defined (in his *Life in Schools*) as cultural forms, stressing that they're all about the economy, desire, values, power/knowledge, ideologies and relations. At any rate, somewhere in there, I had a deal with a company called Culture, Inc. (I smile to remember this one.)

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<sup>8</sup> For a detailed account of her experience in the language and culture of what she also calls Blitz teaching, see Eva P. Bueno's "A Leading Language School" (2003).

<sup>9</sup> Can you imagine referring to someone, in matter-of-fact, everyday current English, as a *half*, let alone meaning that you will allow her, in your English-speaking idiom, to be imagined as a *half-blood*? Well I just narrowly avoided doing so, opting to use the Japanese term. I guess the going term in our language would be *bi-racial*, but the only difference I see is that one is admittedly subtractive, where the other is merely additive.

<sup>10</sup> On the other hand, you know, back at Jack's, a member in one of my classes spoke to my astonishment of how Japanese people's "black" eyes were especially adapted to bright sunlight, and thus did not require the use of sunglasses—explaining what I'd taken for a mere convention of fashion so far as I'd seen it evidenced in the streets.



Meanwhile, the more general idea of *culture* in English, going back to Middle English, refers to a cultivated piece of land. In the Latin root, identified as the verb *colere*, we find a sense of cultivation, of tending, of inhabiting. A way of life, as I like to put it, but also (if I may here distill another gist of McLaren's, borrowing I think from Henry Giroux) a form of production.

The first culture-centre in which I'd gone to work was referred to in the office at Jake's as *the bunka centre*. It was operated by the local branch of the public broadcaster NHK. The Centre offered art classes and other educational events at a low rate for the community. When I got there I found that the operating class model (from how far back I couldn't tell) was to go round the table and have each member of the class relate a story or raise a talking point. Perhaps it is significant that this pure *eikaiwa* model was the habit of a class hosted by NHK, whose airwaves carried several popular *eikaiwa* programmes—and these actually seemed to have worked quite well for some I met, particularly in this class. I wonder, indeed, if it was NHK that coined the term *eikaiwa* back in 1945 when, as you've related elsewhere, it appeared in the name of a radio show, first *Eigo Kaiwa* and then *Eikaiwa*.

As *sensei*<sup>11</sup> in the Culture™-centre bastion of the many *shumi* (a place where you could take lessons in printmaking, karaoke, tap-dancing, belly-dancing, yoga, cooking, Ikebana, basic computer use, even smiling and of course English), I had been teaching in the English school for a couple of years when I was invited to plan and introduce a new course. It was to be carried out in English, yet to be something that wouldn't only be another *eikaiwa* class; not actually part of the existing English school, but part of an arrangement with the wider culture centre, promoted as a new course of a new kind. It seemed, in my conversations with the school manager, that the easiest way to imagine such a thing was by looking at the construct of four skills in language teaching—reading, writing, speaking, listening: *eikaiwa*, as a form of conversation, would then ideally be limited to practice in the latter two, and a course of reading or writing in English would be considered, in a certain sense, something else entirely. Yet, despite the advertised uniqueness of this class with *Kureigu Sensei*, even because of it, this experience remained always always always mediated in conversation.

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<sup>11</sup> *Sensei*: the *sen-* part (先) may be read as *previous*; the *-sei* part (生) refers to *birth*.

To me it seemed natural to open a workshop for English-language creative writing. This is the class to which I invited you, one evening, to discuss writing poetry in English, and your own work, especially as a translator of Bashô and Santôka.

Eventually I also started a kind of readers' circle in literature originally written in English, where the members would take turns leading each other, in English, through critical readings of selections from the works of Shakespeare, Milton, Swift, Melville, Conrad and others. Here, for certain, I thought I'd found *eikaiwa* in its purest form. Not that I really imagine it would work for everyone, but such were the ways I could think of, ways of opening conversation, with my students, to something beyond merely getting together every week or so in order just to speak to each-other in English (potentially about the same things week after week, seldom showing much progress in the production of English to speak about those things—overall, a process familiar to any *eikaiwa no sensei*, and one especially prevalent in the *salon* model for these classrooms, wherein students gather with a teacher—and chat around a sort of coffee-table setup).<sup>12</sup>

Most important in these experiences, I think, was the sort of community I was able to build, small though it may have been, of people who could accomplish so much, attending the ordinary *eikaiwa* classes at first, then moving into places in either or both of the more literary groups. They became the people with whom I'd celebrate Christmas, for example, inviting them to my home for eggnog, music, readings and stories.

In the Culture centre, I felt that the possibilities for bringing English conversation to bear in praxis upon specific cultural forms were limitless, and the opportunities as varied as the facilities. In an eight-storey building, there was of course a kitchen, there was at least one art

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<sup>12</sup> So far as it's redolent of the French xvii<sup>ième</sup> or xviii<sup>ième</sup>, the *salon* is also a model for pure *eikaiwa*. The trouble with most *eikaiwa* salons is that they take place in a kind of *fishbowl*, with the teacher-host (in all his celebrity, verve and charm) navigating some kind of passage through what could indeed be a floating world — far removed, really, from her own home and smack-dab in the middle of an office with phones ringing here and there, a general buzz of activity setting the tone for what passes for conversation. The best salons I've seen gather a core of more or less the same members week by week, so that there won't be too many introductions (an over-emphasized theme in *eikaiwa*, it seems to me) going round and the group can maintain some continuity of feeling as people come and go, before and after the classes that they really came for. Gradually, themes emerge, and we run with them as far as we like. I would like it if there were more than one conversation going on round a table, if the table were large enough. Then I would feel we were really doing what we could do, in what would rightly be identified as a process of *enlightenment*.

studio, there were other studios for dance and exercise, there was a karaoke room. There was even a *chashitsu*, for tea ceremonies, made up with the *nijiriguchi* crawlspace-sized door and everything, all decorated on the outside (which is all I ever saw) as it were in a garden somewhere, with a path leading to it, across the *roji*, the dewey ground. Small, simple, quiet. Any of these, I felt, could be a unique sort of space for *eikaiwa*. For my part, I was doing what I could with my readers and writers. Well, really I was just getting started.

I guess that although I'd been asked to imagine something other than *eikaiwa*, I naturally carried *eikaiwa* into these projects of reading and writing. It is everywhere I go, I'm sure, being in the first place *eikaiwa no sensei*.

You question whether the middle-class lifestyle, being no doubt a way of life of some kind, can be considered a *dō*. You're right, I feel, finally to insist that *dō* must be something that can bring us deeper, beyond, "something fecund that will be our living a life that is genuine" and, as I think you would also say, getting away from the false comforts of an imagined middle-class way of life. I wonder what you see as the potential for a sense of *dō* in *eikaiwa*.

I guess you'll be reading this as Golden Week begins. Do you have any special plans for the holidays ?

Enjoying the weather and riding my bike more, now that the weather's getting warmer,

—C-Mac.

### Dō

I'll here pause and attend to 道 (*Tao/michi/dō*), which I now want to locate beyond *shumi*, since the desire by which we relate ourselves to 道 seems to involve more of us, more of our selves, than the concern with which we come together to practice our *shumi*. Concern for practice in *shumi*, I think, lies beyond any simple passing interest that we might take in cultural forms such as baseball, hockey or the tea ceremony (though baseball, hockey or the tea ceremony may all serve equally well, as *shumi* or as 道). I'm thinking of concern on the order of what one pursues in one's praxis, for instance, in a profession : a concern for others, for service within a community, mediated through a particular activity.

I'd like to lay out the little I know of 道. As Tao it may be found in an English dic-

tionary, defined as a way, especially, of harmony with the natural order. In Japanese, I realize it may be read as *michi* (street, road, even in the everyday sense) or as that piece we might identify as a common suffix (*dô*) in all these different spiritual disciplines known as the Japanese arts (including martial arts)—and *art*, too, can mean *way*, especially in the German idiom we sometimes experience in our use of English. 道 strikes me, from the sum total of my shallow readings in the *Tao Te Ching* or in the (other) words of Chuang Tzu : as a way *out* but also a way *in*, but always a way *through*—through the world, the given nature of things taken in totality ; perhaps a way of *mastery*, not only of nature but of ourselves ; a way of mastery situated in a given natural world, bringing us to a desired freedom, to happiness, to nature—here it may indeed be a way *back*, but always a way *through*, always situated in natural particularity. It is a journey or way of the soul, too, as explored in Bashô's *Oku no Hosomichi*, a poetic travelogue, a journey deep into northeastern Honshu, mindful no doubt of the region's name as *Michinoku* or, perhaps, *Michi no Oku*, *End-of-the-Road Territory*. *Oku no Hosomichi* has been translated into English in various ways, notably *The Narrow Road to the Deep North*, *Narrow Road to the Interior*, *Backroads to Far Towns* and, in Watson's edition, *Bashô's Road's Edge*. To venture my own phrasing, just for fun, I might suggest *The Trail of What Lies Beyond*. It is on this trail that Bashô wrote, *taking each day as journey, dwelling in journey*.

Watson writes :

Yes, every day in every way we are a journeywork of stars. Even standing still we move, change, live, die. As Heraclitus said, the only thing permanent is change. My home's name, 万流庵 [*Ban Ryû An*], the All Flowing Cottage, marks that as the letters inked on upturned roots (weathered enough to look like driftwood) fade, dissolve, disappear.

The Dao permeates everything and nothing. It goes with the energy flow all our prepositions channel—in, through, out of, back to and all the rest. It is as they say in “the heavens” and—as Chuang-Tzu tells us—it's in the piss and shit. It's everywhere in every thing and there is nowhere it is not. It's in our words so how could it not be in *eikaiwa*.

But : what can be said about the Dao is not the Dao. It's a way but it's the condition of there being no way. (Watson, personal communication, August 12, 2009)

Bashô, meanwhile, at the beginning of the *Hosomichi* :

A hundred generations are made of months and days passing by, as each passing year is a

traveller too. By boat to living's limits or leading a horse by its mouth towards old age is taking each day as journey, dwelling in journey. Many ancients have perished in journey. I too—from which year was it?—guided by winds from distant clouds, cannot keep from thinking to drift, roaming the strand, from autumn of last year ridding this ramshackle hut of cobwebs, year's end soon, hazy sky raising spring, would sooner be passing through the Shirakawa Barrier and in spite of myself feel totally involved with things of god, feel summoned by the god of travel and cannot take up what's at hand. So : mend my breeches, fasten a new cord to my *kasa*—no sooner treating my shins with moxa than Matsushima's moon burns in my heart—turn tenancy over to another and move to Sampu's country house.

grass hut

home to change

chickabiddy dolls

Leave this first portion posted on the hut. (Watson, Trans. ; personal communication, August 28, 2009)

Writing at about O-Bon, I find myself recalling how the holiday fell in 2006. I'd read about the *yamabushi* (Buddhist priests of the mountains, if you will) in Japan's sacred mountains, how their ascetic practice includes, famously, meditation immersed beneath a waterfall. It was to me more of a summer vacation, but there was I with my companion in the Dewa Sanzan (a group of three such mountains, found in Yamagata prefecture), near the summit of the tallest of the three, Gas San. Now I don't recall if Bashō's known to have visited more than Haguro San, the smallest of the three, but the entire arrangement of trails amongst these three places, with these old roads made of stone along most of the way, traversed not in solitude (not at O-Bon, at any rate) but as part of a steady stream of climbers—these are ways of pilgrimage. We'd spent the day climbing up to the Gas San summit by a longer alternate route (and mostly deserted, as alternate routes always seem to be in these places—even at O-Bon, fortunately) to what most of our fellow-travellers and holiday-makers were taking, then down along the main trail to drop off our packs at the *hinan-goya* where we planned to sleep, then down some more, over ladders (again alone since the destination was accessible from the other side by bus) to Yudono San's revered hot spring, where steaming waters issue from a great boulder turned orange by traces of the waters that flow all over it; we'd walked about, as pilgrims do, in the warm cleansing waters of the shrine, then climbed again up over the ladders to the *hinan-goya* ; we'd experienced a practically mystical sunset in which I'm pretty sure we were seeing as far south along the Japan Seacoast as Sado ga Shima ; and just at dusk there

appeared at our hut's door a fellow who said he was in *yamabushi* training, on his way over the summit to where he was lodging (he made the trek out and the return, before and after the day's exercises, with each dawn and dusk). He told us he knew where to find some good spring-water, just off the trail a little distance from here. We decided to follow him.

Passing along at dusk, behind him, I was aware of how difficult it was to keep up although his footsteps laid out a rhythm that matched the ground much more effectively than mine had done all day, and thus seemed easier to follow than my own sense of where feet could fall. He certainly didn't appear to be in any kind of hurry, like he was floating up the slopes and simply drawing me along, aloft. We conversed, too, and I learnt that he was from Tokyo, where, no doubt, he had work and all the rest ; but he would spend all of his holidays in the mountains, and was able to do so as part of a curriculum of training so that one day he'd be *yamabushi*.<sup>13</sup> After we got to the spring, he turned around and in so doing seemed, before my eyes, to become more like a cloud than like a human being, but a cloud with these eyes peering out from the midst. Anyway, it took my companion and me twice as long to walk back *down* to the hut, and when we got back we really couldn't account for how we'd got *up* to that place so quickly.

I wrote of this experience to Watson. He wrote back :

Yes *Eigo no Hosomichi*, going on into the cloud, the blur, with only a pair of human eyes looking out from within it. The only human element left.

B may have got to 50 K a day. Some days. Pushing it. And that is walking in *waraji* (straw sandals). Not the walking shoes available today. And they had to change them a couple times each day. They'd wear out.

Satori, enlightenment, samadhi, nirvana. Bliss is the word used to describe the state of samadhi. God consciousness some call it. Or in Buddhism it might be considered an end to suffering. Life with no suffering. Freedom from suffering. Are these attempts to escape ? Ways out ? The Buddha as I understand it was seeking a way out of suffering.

Realizing there is no way, does that become a way of no way ? Sort of like Sisyphus. (Watson, personal communication, 15 August 2009)

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<sup>13</sup> I've since learnt that there are courses available to anyone who might be serious about such an experience. They're not so different in price, if you break it down to a daily rate (they seem, often, to be three-day courses), compared to staying at an *onsen* (hot-spring) resort. Another alternate route to the enjoyment of the mountains ?

Sisyphus, it is worth noting, is a favoured figure in Maxine Greene's *Teacher as Stranger* (1973), as she calls on teachers to do philosophy. Her Sisyphus is borrowed from Camus (1955), who wrote of him as a kind of absurd hero. The Sisyphian Task is punishment for a life of breaking basic laws of god and man : killing guests, tricking and binding Thanatos, and so on; Sisyphus was literally a hell-raiser, and this is what he had coming to him. The Sisyphian Challenge with which he settles into eternity is to roll a great rock uphill ; the rock never makes it, rolling back down to the bottom ; the Challenge repeatedly renews itself, and the rock gathers no moss. Camus writes of Sisyphus's "scorn of the gods, his hatred of death, and his passion for life" (1955, p. 89). "The teacher", maintains Greene, "who is familiar with anguish and absurdity can hardly feel sanguine in his ordinary life" (1973, p. 258).<sup>14</sup> And with absurdities, we remember like Estragon in *Waiting for Godot*, there is "Nothing to be done" (Beckett, 1952/1994, p. 2)—even when, as Block points out, "this doesn't stop them from waiting for Godot" (1998, p. 28). The question of curriculum in *eikaiwa* reaches deep as we ask ourselves what it means to *teach* (or to *learn*) *English conversation*. Doesn't it depend on what we want to talk about ? Will our conversation be more or less essentially *English* as we discuss, now this topic, now that ? Is it that we want to approach English language by addressing progressively more English topics ? Or is English language merely understood as providing a way of conversing, and conversation as providing enlightenment ? Is enlightenment an understanding of freedom, a freedom greater than the suffering that confronts us in life as we know it ? *What, after all, is the English that you want to learn ?* After asking all of these questions and more, we may well find that at any rate, at least there is no other way of going about things. No way *except* through.

May 1 Friday

Dear C-Mac—

Probably going on with letters and narratives with your various correspondents will help build an *eikaiwa* community of sorts. Then newsletters, panel discussions, *kaiwa* bars, etc.

A subculture though not necessarily deviant in any criminal way.

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<sup>14</sup> **Sanguine**  
 ruddy ;  
 optimistic ;  
 (full) of blood ;  
*genki*

*Zenmai*. It's a fern that is edible and long ago a short piece of fiction of mine was published under that name. *Zenmai* it is. In English it's called the osmund fern ; it flowers too. Difficult to prepare for eating though. Please don't confuse me with Donny Osmund.

Well you did your homework regarding Ranald and Townsend and Okichi. It's been so long since I read about them. It's refreshing to hear of them again. There is speculation that RM was a U.S. government spy. A book on that subject even.

There are Japanese works dealing with the Okichi story. Can't remember whether there's a Nô play or Kabuki or what. Various things on her I think. *Tôjin Okichi* is one title if my memory is right.

And one of America's finest poets attended Townsend Harris High School in NYC. William Carlos Williams.

Yes, I agree that *dô* goes beyond *shumi* and *shumi* goes beyond *hobby*.

Yes, I'm still doing yoga every day on my own. And, since it's good to get to a more experienced practitioner from time to time, I do go occasionally on a Sunday morning to a group session. That teacher still leads a simple life and is satisfied driving a non-luxury automobile. I may have lost my "veteran" status in the eyes of the other members. On the other hand it is disappointing to see those others still unable to do some of the poses that, if they would practice every day for a month, they'd be able to do. But they don't. There seems to be something like determination *not* to do them every day. Maybe there is a fear that they would *kawaru*, change, and no longer be the *normal, regular person (futsû no hito)* they see themselves as.

It makes me wonder, though, if they even care to honestly look at themselves at all. After all there is that fear of deviating from what is considered normal. It seems that, if one really becomes serious about something, that person is seen as heading towards *sensei*. Or else why do it so seriously? That is the thinking, I think. That is why they asked me so many times if I'm planning to be a yoga teacher when I retire from the university. It is not my purpose to become a *sensei* though ; just to be responsible for my own health.



Yoga is like religion or anything else : you bring it into a culture and it takes on various aspects of that society. Yoga in Japan is different from yoga in India. Zen Buddhism in America is different from Zen in Japan. Christmas in England is different from Christmas in Italy. On and on. Same with foreign language classrooms I suspect.

Fear of deviation (or of the potential social ostracism that comes with it) is a big factor in this society and begins at an early age with school lunches and dress, among other things. The school lunch has to be in the range of what everyone else brings. There is variation. It doesn't mean everyone is eating exactly the same meal, but the variation must be within inspected limits. Like you can have *tonkatsu* (deep fried pork cutlet) or fried chicken, spaghetti or *yaki-soba*. That sort of variation.

Once when our kids were on a midget league baseball team they were going on the road and were told to bring two *onigiri* each for lunch. The inside of the *onigiri* could vary but it was supposed to be two. Instead I made them sandwiches to take. There was some flak about that. And the coach *gave me a look* too.

You're right that I no longer attend Ms. Mercedes's class, nor do I receive Ayurvedic medical advice from her Indian spouse "Dr." BMW.

Whether *eikaiwa* can be a *dō*, a way, a path. It depends. Anything can. How much of one's life one is willing to give to whatever the event is. If one gives it one's life then that event will become a way of life. With *eikaiwa*, what is the purpose? Does anyone really see *eikaiwa* as a way of life?

The purpose of anything we do is, ultimately, life, as is the meaning of each word we utter. They all come from and mean life.

To communicate through words in a way wherein the words are working at their utmost to say the unsayable (=life) is poetry. Taken broadly and not just as what is formally presented as poetry on a page. So that some passages of *Moby Dick* are poetry. Some passages in Cormac McCarthy's *Suttree* are poetry, and we can say that about various other works that are not set down as formal poems. Some things Emerson wrote are poetry, but usually *not* his formal

poetry.

It is possible then that what gets said in a conversation class can be vital enough, fecund enough, to be called poetry. Any words that move us to look at our lives deeply and honestly, whether they are on the page of a book or coming from the mouth of someone sitting in an *ei-kaiwa* salon or wherever. There are no rules, no restrictions. It can be a *dō*.

\* \* \* \* \*

There is still contact with a handful of students who've come my way at TGU. One is married and with three kids. Living now in Senegal. Just the other day she sends us seeds of the Baobab tree. I'm looking to germinating and planting them over Golden Week. The eldest we saw just a couple months back when we were down in Gunma at a hot spring. She's 41 now. Going to grad school like you. A couple I see from time to time as they are working here in Sendai. Graduated seven years ago. One I introduced to yoga therapy. She has some kind of involuntary nervous system problem that I'd heard can be treated through yoga therapy. She's doing better. The youngest just graduated in March and now is down in Tokyo working on JR trains.

The connection is that they all put their heart into it. They weren't genius level brains or anything but they put themselves into what they did with me and when they are willing to do that I make myself available to them outside of class wherever.

A community evolves. A community of individuals. Which is an expression I got from Corman, who got it from WCW.

Others I do not open myself to and do not make myself freely available. It's because the feeling that comes to me is that they see me as a *renshū dai* (a practice dummy, maybe), not a person, but an entity they can improve their conversation with.

Free, yes, sure. Never did money occur to me with those five above. Gladly I gave them what they seemed to need. One, the youngest, was over here learning yoga from me even.

Because of my sense of where they are coming from. From someplace human and someplace

good. Not from ambition. Not that ambition is necessarily an evil. It's just not something I can appreciate or get with.

In my thinking it is only when each is coming from this simply human place can there be communication. Otherwise there are obstructions and the energy flow does not get through.

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My sense of the *kaiwa* classroom is that it's a basketball court. They need to get on the court and play. Coach stops the play from time to time to correct things, show how to, etc. But mostly they need to experience the joy of playing. I tell them speaking ability is very much like a muscle and that the more they speak the stronger they will get. If they lay off long the muscle will weaken. Also I try to get them to become independent learners so that each gets a sense of what it is he or she needs to work on more. Granted, very few do that, but it seems to me this is the way to go.

Otherwise we have the standard hamburger factory approach to language teaching. In other words we each have to come up with some way that makes sense to us, we need to develop a personal sense of what it is we are doing.

This doesn't mean that what another teacher is doing is wrong. Hopefully what they are doing is coming from within themselves, something they've worked out for themselves. Otherwise it's a cop out. Students sense that right away and know it's the same old stuff they've always been getting.

Signing off now.

Later,

Zenmai

5/2 7 a.m.

Morning C-Mac.

You ask about the kanji for *shi* (poem, poetry), as in Bashô's sense of *shidô*. The latter would be 詩道. The poetry *shi* originates long ago in China and is connected with the word "leaf" (or leaves). If my memory is correct.

All for now.

Take care,

Zenmai

2 May 2009

Thanks for putting it so well, Zenmai :

these letters and narratives will hopefully build an *eikaiwa* community, if only for the purposes of representing the conversational quality of what *eikaiwa* is, or how it's experienced. Whether it might extend into newsletters, panel discussions or *kaiwa* bars (or perhaps salons, in the old Enlightenment sense of people gathering on a regular basis to discuss a particular topic)—well, I guess that remains to be seen. I especially appreciate your comment, though : that such a community could be “a subculture though not necessarily deviant in any criminal way”. I guess I should say I hope so!

You've related the hypothesis that Ranald MacDonald was an American spy, sent, more than drawn, on his adventure into the unknown. I suppose there is something dashing and adventurous about how he turns up on Rishiri Island,<sup>15</sup> calls himself a shipwreck, and gets passed along, clear across Hokkaido and down the greater part of Honshu's length. He must have been quite aware (as I'm sure 007 himself would have been, were he there) of risking his life on this voyage.

Okichi, meanwhile, you're quite right, seems to have been immortalized repeatedly in Japanese drama, and *Tôjin Okichi* (*Okichi the Concubine*) is indeed one such title—of a 1930 movie starring Sessue Hayakawa.

So *dô* goes beyond *shumi* as *shumi* goes beyond *hobby*. You say your yoga practice, for example, goes beyond hobby, in your daily pursuit of the discipline's benefits. This seems well beyond the habits of your classmates, whom you join only occasionally, and yet, you're right, in order to retain your *veteran* status in their eyes, you'd need to be amongst them every week. This is what you've given up, as you've gone the *kawatta* route (as one who is *changed* or, to

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<sup>15</sup> Rishiri is a remote place, even today—part of a national park, off the coast of a wide farmland that stretches more than a hundred kilometres along the roadside before you get to the port of Wakkanai, with the neighbouring Rebun Island included as well ; I've seen Rishiri's peak, one of those they call a *ko* (*little*) *Fuji*, from the boat to Rebun Tō—escorted the entire way by grey seagulls, tenacious as anything on a day too windy for their feeders, the passengers, to be out on the deck in large numbers.

borrow a popular adjective from my part of the world, *different*). I'm glad you've put your finger on this hang-up, as it may indeed be the very thing that keeps a hobbyist's interest in check. Some will no doubt practise yoga only when they're wearing the right clothes for it, only when they've met for a yoga class ; to practise at home, for instance, would be *kawatta* in the *crazy* sense to such practitioners.

Let's call them the hobbyists, and say that for you it's more of a *shumi*—or is it rather *dô* to you ? Would the *shumi* praxis have as its goal that you should become *sensei*, just as others have asked you whether you'd become yoga *sensei* ? Perhaps you've left that behind as well. Is the practice of speaking English, in Japan, one which leads to becoming *eikaiwa no sensei* ? I remember hearing about a yoga class, somewhere in Sendai, that would conduct itself in English. For those to whom *eikaiwa* is more than a hobby, I guess.

5 May

So, indeed, yoga is like religion or anything else (even the *zenmai* from which you take your name) : plant it in one place and it must adapt. I have no doubt that yoga in Japan differs from yoga in India, that American Zen and Japanese Zen are two different things, as also Christmas in England, Italy—Japan, for that matter, with its feast of chicken and birthday-style cake. I agree that the same goes for EFL classrooms, and this is exactly why I choose to dwell on *eikaiwa*—as a unique area of praxis in EFL.

To those of us who live as *gaijin* anyway, and thus tend to notice life in Japan from a bit of a distance, fear seems strong, or somehow differently pronounced (compared to expressions of which we've been aware in the places from which we've come), of deviation from what we might call a bourgeois mentality ; you suggest that yoga, as also EFL, must adapt to that mentality. Certain practices become preferred or expected.

A student may often say, plain as day and fully confident that this is the natural way of having *eikaiwa*, *I want you to give me an equal portion of class-time in which to speak to you in turn, as everyone else will also speak to you—directly (we don't want to speak to each other as much as we want to speak to you)—and I want you to simply correct my mistakes as I go.* Similarly your son and his baseball coach have said to you that you may put anything you want in the two *onigiri*<sup>16</sup> which must be in his lunch, but there must be two of them and they

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<sup>16</sup>—*rice ball* doesn't really give much of a picture unless you've seen one—

must be *onigiri* and not sandwiches. It's like on the plane : *Pork or chicken ? Spaghetti or yakisoba ?* (I once overheard an attendant on an Air Canada flight asking a Japanese passenger the literal translation of such a question : *Kohii ? Cha ?* then *Ocha ? Kocho ?*—same rising intonation she'd use in the English phrasing, no trace of the *nomimasuka* which would ordinarily be required, so far as I know, for intelligible conversation in an imagined typical Japanese idiom.) There are the permissible deviations in the way we practise *eikaiwa*, and they follow a set of unwritten rules in whose composition I, as *gaijin*, have certainly never had a part. Of course I've had no part in deciding what Communicative Language Teaching should be, either, but my transgression will begin with what is explicitly prescribed in the classroom and then venture, only at greater risk of being misunderstood, into the office behind the classroom.<sup>17</sup>

The question remains, I suppose : can *eikaiwa* be of *dō*, or need it be, if the sense of *shumi* may match it for some, and that of *hobby* for many ? As you say, anything may become a way, a path, for the soul to tread. As we give our lives to it, especially as teachers, let's hope that it becomes a way of life.

The purpose, I would say, is to experience *truth*, whether understood as actuality or the beyond, in *inquiry*—that spoken in our lives, as we carry out what we understand as teaching. Life seeking knowledge. The root and purpose of anything, you say, the meaning of every utterance, is *life*. If this meaning is unsayable by means of any particular word (other than *life*), and when words work to say the unsayable (as *life*, for example), poetry is possible : I understand that this is how you try to direct your courses at the university. This is your own *dō* into the language classroom, and it's really not far from mine—at heart.

To speak of achievements, then, I'm glad that you list those students who've graduated from your courses and with whom you've maintained contact over the years. Each little summary you provide gives a picture of someone who continues to learn from you, and no doubt someone who teaches you as well. To me also, such lines of contact are precious, and it is really a recognition of *heart (kokoro)* that I guess we're talking about here : not just the heart that they put into their English lessons but the heart that they showed you as well; the heart of things

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<sup>17</sup> Do I mean, here, to imagine the office, at Jake's for example, as a *backstage* kind of area, or a place to leave your shoes before entering the temple you've come to visit ?

that you and they were able to go on into or towards. Of course this is what we remember as teachers. And so a *community of individuals* evolves, based in mutual *recognition* and shared interest, shared concern, shared intention, shared desire.

Others may show interest but it must be categorized as ambition ; we forget them. This doesn't mean that they're not also outstanding students, but only that we tend to forget ourselves as stepping-stones for those who chase ambitions which we may not even understand. But to be simply human with each other—to me as to you, this is the root meaning of a course-title like *English Communication*, which in the end is just another way to say *eikaiwa*, after we've pretty much decided that, in the English spoken outside of Japan, the phrase *English conversation* may not have any specific content.

For now, signing off with itchy eyes and contacts in them, I remain

sincerely yours,

—C-Mac.

May 9 2009

Dear C-Mac—

There is a book by Terry Eagleton called, if I remember correctly, *Literary Theory*. In it he talks of an experiment conducted—by him or someone else—in which readers are presented with texts without being given authors' names. Some were from the canon usually fed to university students, some were “pulp”. The readers were to select which works appealed to them most, and, guess what, the pulp came out as the generally more favored readings. Go figure.

In a poetry seminar some 12 years back, three of the four members took the easy way and just brought in poetry from their high school textbooks, which came complete with the textbook author's words telling them what each poem “means”. One girl though—and she is the one who the other day sent me the Baobab seeds from Senegal—really went to town. She scoured the university library. She brought in stuff she found in second hand bookstores downtown. She brought poems from Thailand, from Germany, from Indonesia, from England, from China. She is the one who introduced me to Santōka. *And* : the three others there with us were exposed to these poems too.

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An idea that crossed my mind is that you in your project might theorize on ways in which *ei-kaiwa* can be liberatory (this is hooks's word which doesn't seem to have worked its way into any dictionaries I have). How can a *dō* be liberating? As opposed to the standard academic classroom fare of passive students and professors droning into a microphone, the *kaiwa* classroom can be almost wholly based on experiential knowledge. It can be a place where authoritative (coming from the one with the "right" to disseminate knowledge) analytical knowledge shares equally with other styles of learning. The *kaiwa* classroom can be *about* its members, their lives, their thoughts, their feelings, their experiences. Where the standard lecture classroom is a predetermined package of knowledge directed *at* them. Plus: the *kaiwa* classroom could be set forth as a liberatory pedagogical model for the rest of the university. Because it seems to me, and as I pointed out in EIALSL, learning needs to be integrated with learners' lives.

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Yes, well in our classes at TGU it is my intent to point learners towards the unknown. Which often means *unlearning* the junk their heads come filled with, acquired in the schooling they've had till now. My own head too was way back overwhelmed by junk. Like how we were taught that the earth's core is molten metal. If I ask in class "how can anyone know that? has anyone ever been there?" they see me as a troublemaker. The earth's molten metal core was just, along with so much else, mostly everything else, something we were supposed to "learn" so as to answer questions on a test so we could pass the course get promoted go to college get a job and not end up on the "Great Society's" streets starving and homeless. Same as Japan, in essence, and elsewhere I imagine.

Which is why it irks me that they made TGU classrooms' windows so that they can only be opened about ten centimeters. Those windows were my favorite teaching aid. For example I'd slide them wide open and with my arm guide their vision outdoors and ask: "Do you see any time out there? Any minutes or seconds or hours? How about a year? If there really is no such thing as a year outside our human heads then how old are you really?" Alas. How can I do that now that a window can be opened only partially?



I asked about that at a meeting. Why the need to mess with the windows. The answer is something about another school far away where a kid had jumped out (probably because the lectures are so dull—Ha !). There is another answer about TGU in particular where some male students would make mischievous fun sliding them open with so much force that the window would bounce out of its track, fall to the ground and break or maybe kill someone who knows.

Now every window's opening is restricted.

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EFL adapts to bourgeois mentality, yes, because EFL wants to make money (just as yoga-biz wants to make money) and EFL was from the beginning manufactured by that bourgeois mentality. If you look at that book called *The History of English Language Teaching* or something like that, Oxford U. Press, or Cambridge, it tells how language learning was needed to conduct business. Trading, etc. From its origins it is all about money—why else would anyone want to learn another language ? Just joking.

Where were we now ? The past : the past doesn't necessarily have to determine what things can change into. Though often it does. A classroom, though, can be a base of transformation, lives can be changed, society can be changed. Thing is members need to let it happen. Let it flow.

I always tell our group, opening the window, "I don't see any rules out there". There are no rules determining what must happen here. But it has to be more than just a topic that people can pay lip-service to, run their mouths blah blah blah and then head for home and television. A teacher has to get them to look deeper. To probe into things below the surface. Even so, only a few will be touched.

(It amuses me the way some sit there in a seminar class nodding along with my words as if they understand or agree, but then it turns out they've grasped nothing. It's just play acting.)

The other day in class we are talking about the North Korean missile crisis, as I named it. I ask them "doesn't Japan have missiles ?" Guess what : no one knows. Then I ask them

why people in North Korea, which is, according to Western and Japanese media, a brutal totalitarian state, know they have missiles, but people in Japan, supposedly a free democratic society, don't know whether they have missiles.

To get them thinking beyond what they hear or see in the media or hear in their usual schoolrooms. To get them looking into their unknown. I'm not giving them any knowledge or information—just pointing to look into something/nothing.

All for now,

薇

Zenmai

10 May (Mothers' Day) 2009

Well, dear Zenmai,

today was a day for lobster with Mom. The much-celebrated season has just begun here. If nothing else, it's a good way to enjoy life on this Island, coming none too soon after such a long winter.

You've asked a bit more about what was going on in the class I've referred to as a kind of readers' circle. My thinking was that it should be treated as a first sally for my students into reading literature in English, emphasizing important elements of theory and criticism. For convenience in gathering material, I selected something called *A Beginner's Guide to Critical Reading*, which did, I felt, an exemplary job of collecting notable texts, presenting them in a simple historical order, and highlighting some of the critical points of view to which these works may be exposed. So we read of "Framing the Outsiders" in a scene from *The Merchant of Venice*, of "Colonialism and the Loss of Eden" in a selection from *Gulliver's Travels*, of "Sex and Politics" in Wilde's fairy tale of *The Happy Prince*, and so forth. Perhaps the input could have been wider in its scope,—but it was, because every Friday afternoon there were half a dozen people gathered in the room to bring their worlds to bear on these works. In any case it seemed like a good place to start. Members of the group would take turns presenting works, would take turns as teachers concerned with the works they'd chosen (each chose her own text in turn), each for at least four consecutive weeks' discussions, from amongst these pages.

I wonder if such classes, in which you have indicated that you would look for a kind of liberatory experience such as bell hooks might advocate, really differ in this potential from *eikaiwa*. Certainly the goal (of finding ourselves on a path towards enlightenment, mastery, freedom, happiness) would be the same.

I guess this could be read as a sense of *dō* in education generally, where, as you say, opposed to the standard academic classroom fare of students who are educated and of professors who are educating into a microphone,<sup>18</sup> the *kaiwa* classroom can be almost wholly based on experiential knowledge, on members' desires and intentions and sense of (changeable, always changeable, contingent) historical context. As hooks says in *Teaching to Transgress*, the standard fare is rooted in fear: "fear that leads to collective professorial investment in bourgeois decorum as a means of maintaining a fixed notion of order".

The *kaiwa* classroom can indeed be *about* its members, their lives, their thoughts, their feelings, their experiences. The standard lecture classroom may be the place where a predetermined package of knowledge (interested in efficient science, economic art or correct religion) is directed at the students, imagined as passive objects in the process of education, as *that which is educated*.

The *kaiwa* classroom could be set forth as a liberatory pedagogical model for the rest of the university—a site for freely exploring the relationships that exist between theory and society,

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<sup>18</sup> I never understood why, at the university, there would always be a microphone on the lectern in a room built to house no more than 60. I remember one classroom in particular, which I shared with a group of history majors (I'll always remember the *banana* dialogues and skits they made for me, using nothing but the words *no*, *not*, *my*, *your* and *banana*). I'd walk in on a day which I knew was brilliant and sunny and mild, and I'd find the curtains drawn and the windows shut behind them, the air-conditioning on, that silly chair lodged inexplicably under the lectern (if I were to sit on it I'd be hidden behind the cavernous lectern), and a microphone on top. Still on. As if the last teacher had simply disappeared at the end of her class-time, leaving behind this empty space directly behind the podium, just so, and everything else centered around that absence, even the students sitting in the same places they'd been sitting for that last lecture, the same places where they always sat; perhaps she'd thought she'd leave things just so for the next teacher, so I could slip in unnoticed; *perhaps she was still there*, I would almost think.

"In a classroom in which all is prescribed and known", Block (1998, p. 15) reminds us, "—in which it is declared what a teacher should teach and a student should learn—there can be no teachers and no students. In such a place we would be not strangers but unseen".

I made it a ritual to right every one of these wrongs, smiling and chatting away with my students and always leaving the microphone perched precariously on the sill of the open window, overlooking (as it did) a part of the hillside which set the campus apart from the rest of the community on three sides. The sound of birdsong, of cicadas in the summertime, would fill the room as we got talking. I remember one unusually clear day beginning class by calling everybody over to the window and help me identify what great mountain we could just make out, way off in the distance. I think we decided, rightly perhaps, that it was Mt Chōkai.

unencumbered by or at any rate distanced from the dominant language of the surrounding society, talking a new society into existence, using a new language. This is very much what I'm driving at in my own sense of what *eikaiwa* offers, as a way of teaching and learning in which students and teachers alike are free to manage themselves, to actively engage each other through questions, dialogue, stories of personal experience grounded in the community setting.<sup>19</sup>

11 May

I feel it is in part the *dō* of *eikaiwa*, this kind of Japanized EFL, to give place first of all to the members of a group who have gathered for the otherwise simple purpose of practising English—but to really give place to the members themselves, their lives. *How was your weekend?* would be a commonplace in how to begin “warming up” to a typical EFL lesson, but I don't imagine EFL teachers as the sort to *allow* such “chitchat” to endure more than five minutes—just until the teacher has taken attendance, you know. However, it seems to me that the more I felt like an *eikaiwa* teacher, the less I would be trying to segue my way into “today's lesson”.

I remember one particular class at the Culture centre, with whom I worked for a good couple of years before starting at the university, whose members generally knew that when they all seemed to have stopped talking for a moment, I would probably introduce some kind of teaching point. I was always amused at how deftly, amongst themselves, they would maintain the lively sort of conversation, especially on topics that arose right there in their accounts of their weekends, most of the time to the utter frustration of any real drive I might have had, to actually do the busy work of being an *EFL teacher*.

The hour would go by, and things would wrap up politely, and that would have been it for a

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<sup>19</sup> I think it's worth noting, here, that an important aspect of the experience of *gaijin* as *eikaiwa no sensei* has to do with the dialogue that may be built in class—a unique forum for engagement with the sometimes strange new community setting of this life in Japan. At the level of concern for community, beyond interest in hobby-culture, a student may find the opportunity to take part in the teacher's sometimes fundamental questions as to what the immediate community consensus, such as there may be, appears to value.

To me as *gaijin no sensei*, “everything is always suspect.... It is the process of inquiry—the production of doubt—that creates the educational environment. The rest is silence” (Block, 1998, p. 15). I am free to envy those who know what is supposed to make up a course in *eikaiwa*, but really, I find I can do much better than to act in resentment towards a kind of certainty resting with standards for *communicative competence* or *performative automaticity*—as if by invoking such terminologies I would then know what I was doing. Instead, I can look beyond, move beyond.

week. But the things they would talk about. One of them took an interest in Dante (and this was probably what sparked my readers' circle), and would sometimes turn everyone's attention to big ideas in mediaeval European mythologies, as she read through the *Inferno* in Japanese and English. She would later spend three months as head reader in the circle, dwelling on a series of heartbreaking passages from *Paradise Lost*. She also enjoyed hiking and fishing and generally getting out into the mountains, so had plenty to talk about. Another, married to an established local doctor with his own practice, liked to consider the sorts of stories you might hear in the news (and to read and discuss newspaper articles in English). Another was an avid traveller and sportsman (and businessman, especially restaurateur), with plenty of reports on skiing in the European alps or of scuba-diving in Okinawa. Another always had stories about looking after her aging mother, but might not share them except in one-to-one sessions, whenever they came up. All kinds of people came through this class (membership was never fixed, as students were free to join any class geared to the right level), but such was perhaps the hard core of members I'd see every week. With each of these personalities came a unique presence about the class, and I was often overjoyed at the house on fire we all were, together.

I wonder if this (to me) *eikaiwa* purity—this forum for inquiry using English as a new mode in conversation—a new medium for *you and me*, for the dialogue (sometimes internal) that we would undertake to deliberately and concertedly, self-consciously, become explicitly aware of and cultivate, (transform, negate) in our desire, beyond concern, for a newly shared citizenship—I wonder whether this process that meant something concrete to each of us, wherein “the teacher-of-the-students and the students-of-the-teacher cease to exist and a new term emerges”, as Freire said (“teacher-student with students-teachers”), would answer well to your sense of learning integrated with learners' lives.

To keep with Freire for just a moment, I want to pay attention to his *logos*, the level of consciousness at which “true knowledge” may appear, as opposed to *doxa*. I want to take this binary and ask it whether, if *Eikaiwa* were *logos*, would *Eigo* as taught in the middle and secondary levels be the *doxa* from which a liberation were called for? Or would that position be better suited to EFL as imagined in “international-best-selling” textbooks in Communicative (English) Language Teaching? In either case, I want to look at *eikaiwa* as *logos*, hear it expressed as dialogue, in which Freire would recommend recognizing our intentions, critiquing them and eventually realizing our humanity, our liberty in the world of our actions, our existence.

## The Garden Path

13 May

You lament the fact that the university has fixed all of its windows so that they won't open more than ten centimetres—these windows which you used to enjoy throwing wide open so that your students could look out from off that hillside, where you would ask them to survey and look for some example of what they were then speaking of—rules, in your example. I remember coming in to a class one day and finding that the windows had these new warning labels and weren't opening as they'd done before. Perhaps this was during your sabbatical year. I was told the same story, of how a student, somewhere, had jumped to some kind of death out a university window; it's certainly true that we can only speculate as to this student's reason for doing so. The story of vandalism I didn't gather at the time.

In your “Essay in a Language Seeking Life”, you've imagined your classroom as a place like a tea-hut in a garden. A place to learn, you say, learning itself, refers to something other than its own formation, the same way a Japanese garden opens to—lets in—what's outside and beyond. Even a distant mountain, framed in foregrounding leaves and lifted by a passing breeze, can be part of such a garden, can be *in* it. The unknown—a mystery—comes into making this garden how it is.

You and I seem to agree that this experience of *eikaiwa* is practically the opposite of EFL, if EFL is often characterized as instrumental, as a link in a chain of world-economic expediences, a kind of social leverage for those who have the means and leisure to pursue English, those who often say they want to learn “business English”. Did you realize, by the way, that the term *pidgin* seems to derive from rendering in a Chinese-speaking context something about how we may *talk business*? It goes back quite a ways.

The yoga practice that is about looking better naked isn't easily seen as a path to enlightenment, yet some would say *any reason is a good one, as long as it gets people in the door*. Perhaps there's something to this, and the teacher needs to allow for many who will begin when few will seem to follow through. The Yoga Works studios now catching on in the US have been called the Starbucks of their industry, and certainly there have been some powerful examples of such marketing amongst *eikaiwa* schools like Telos or Super or, for a really inter-

national example, Blitz. Yet I find that there is always room (perhaps not so much in those schools but more easily, for the few teachers who venture out into them, in other places like culture centres)—room for the other kind of practice that you and I are now able to talk about, where *eikaiwa* is whatever the participants' (yes, including the teacher's) imagination lets it be. We let it be what it will, we let it grow, and we don't try to force it to be something someone says it's supposed to be, in which case, as you say, we are all—learners and teachers—slaves.

It's a beautiful day here (25°) and I'm writing from a hammock in the corner of an apple orchard that's (still) about to blossom. Life is good. Keeping in touch,

—C-Mac.

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