

**TAKIGUCHI Yūshō**

### **Work in Progress**

I have been serializing work every month in a Japanese literary magazine since this spring. This is the first time in my career that I have taken on the challenge of having to write a certain amount each month. Six installments have already been published, and since coming to Iowa, I have sent two more drafts in.

Originally, I intended to write a series of standalone essays. My partner and I were considering moving at that time, so I decided to center the first column around the house I was living in, and the landlord who lived below me (I was very attached to my house, having lived there a long time). The house became the subject of my second column as well—there was so much I had to say about it that it didn't all fit into my first column.

And then, the same thing happened with my second column. I ended up writing about the house in the next two essays as well. The series gradually digressed into other topics. I wrote about the wrinkly face of a neighborhood dog, the day I went cherry blossom-viewing with friends, and later that night when one of those friends, parent to a small child, was unexpectedly moved to tears. The narration also changed in point of view, and I was no longer the sole storyteller; through my pen, my partner and friends' voices came to life. At that point, instead of re-iterating anecdotes from my daily life, I began to tell stories I had never heard before...apparently, I wasn't dealing with a series of essays here. Before I knew it, it seems I had a novel on my hands.

I never begin novels with a plan. Nor a plot. Nor do I decide what kind of ending I'm heading towards. But I don't approach novels like a shaman—there's no spirits writing through me while I'm unconscious. I take responsibility for my text. I pay attention to its every nook and cranny.

When I begin a new work, rather than have a concrete scenario in mind, I have a vague premonition. Of course, I think about specific characters and scenes in advance, but they don't necessarily make it to the page. Until I start writing, I don't know what will happen.

Yet, even after I start, I can't predict where the novel will go. For example, when a musician makes a sound, and follows it with a different sound, it isn't for any logical reason, but as a sort of *response* to the previous sound. Isn't each movement of the dancing body or the painting brush an improvisation, determined by the movements that came before it? The same applies to writing. When I write, each sentence is in response to sentences I have already written. It is an uncertain and unreliable process. But that indefinability is what makes writing so vital.

In novels, fiction invades reality and reality invades fiction. I believe this is not just limited to the world of novels, but rather reflects the state of reality and time that we live in. That is to say, we imagine things that aren't there. Our lives are dictated by constant remembering. We can't stop thinking about what's missing – it has become our way of life. And yet, it's an unreliable way to live.

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ICPL and the International Writing Program Panel Series, September 21, 2018

Abani (Nigeria/USA), Bêgné (Argentina), Huang (Taiwan), Takiguchi (Japan), Okolo (Nigeria)

For electronic texts, please visit: <http://iwp.uiowa.edu/archives/iowa-city-public-library-presentations>

For video archives, please visit: <https://www.icpl.org/video/series/international-writing-program>

When I write, I rely on the unreliable. I rely on the memories of things that have disappeared. The most important thing in that process is that words—from someone, or somewhere, directed toward somewhere else—are created and strung together. I don't invest a lot of meaning into the dividing lines between reality and fiction, or essays and novels.

I think rather than just writing, it's as if I'm hearing someone's voice come out from somewhere. Being a good companion to that voice is key. I don't know what's in store for the piece I am writing now. However, I trust the voice that I hear. I will leave it up to that person.

*Translated by Alexa Frank  
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