

RETHINKING RESTORATION

The Seventh International Symposium on Literature and Environment in East Asia

21-22 November 2020

Konan University, Kobe, Japan

Call for Papers

The Seventh International Symposium on Literature and Environment in East Asia (ISLE-EA) will be held at Konan University in Kobe, Japan. Kobe, the city closest to the epicenter of the 1995 Great Hanshin Earthquake, was once devastated and has since been the focus of a long-standing effort for rebuilding. After 25 years, with its damage hardly felt directly now, the place invokes a nationally-shared narrative of restoration after catastrophe. Therefore, in the aftermath of the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake, Kobe very naturally came to the minds of many people who remembered and reproduced the stories of the city rebuilding itself. The narrative of restoration might convey a hope—a hope that we can always reclaim normalcy however radically it seems lost.

Choosing for the venue such a symbolic place in terms of Japanese disaster discourse, and with its wider implications for environmental discourse of East Asia and beyond, we present the ISLE-EA 2020 as an occasion for rethinking the idea, and the ideal, of *restoration*. This term is multivalent, as we realize its cross-contextual use. In the context of environmentalism, “to restore” signifies human efforts to bring back the natural environment to its original, or what some may call “pristine,” state. However, things to be restored always include more than just material matters. Body, mind, life, lifeways, relationships, society, politics, economy—each of these can rightfully appear when we discuss restoration. Moreover, we are often required to restore two or more things which are seemingly incompatible, such as the city and the wild, and economy and natural resources. For instance, efforts to restore the urban environment in which the majority of people live may be hazardous to the natural environment. In our time, which may soon be officially called the Anthropocene, we cannot innocently talk about restoration.

With its essential meaning of “to return,” the idea of restoration also does not fail to raise the question: to return to where and to what? It is a cliché to posit some original, pristine state of nature to which our current degraded nature needs to return. However, should not such thinking be brought into direct conversation with a completely opposite view toward nature; one which sees the natural environment as a process of incessant change? The same can be said about our understanding of the body: is there a pristine state of the body, to which our degraded body enmeshed in the toxic environment can still be brought back? How should we connect the trans-corporeality of our body with the discourse of restoration?

In rethinking restoration, we also need to consider the fact that the term clearly has a political resonance. What can be called a political ideology of restoration has functioned, for instance, as a convenient cover for our critically “inconvenient truth” that it is in no sense possible for us to go back to the time before the 2011 Fukushima Daiichi nuclear disaster. The ideology of restoration might only make us believe that the impossible can

happen, insinuating a false hope into our thoughts—the hope that we can always reclaim normalcy however radically it seems lost! What roles do literature and criticism play in reconsidering an ideology of restoration?

The above are only a few examples of rethinking the idea and ideal of restoration within today's ecocritical frameworks. We invite papers which discuss narratives, language, and imagination of restoration in East Asia. Potential topics for ISLE-EA 2020 may include, but are not limited to:

- disaster and catastrophe reflected in literature and film
- restoration through storytelling
- art and literature for/against restoration
- trauma and memory as a process of restoration
- narrative of resilience and/or sustainability
- restoration of the natural/urban environments in the Anthropocene
- multispecies studies and the choices of what to be restored
- the ideology of restoration and conservative regime
- the ideology of restoration and neoliberalism
- primary nature and secondary nature (or what if there is no such distinction?)
- medical discourse and literature about restoration
- possibility of environmentalism without restoration

Keynote Speakers:

Hannes Bergthaller, National Chung-Hsing University, author of *Anthropocene: Key Issues for the Humanities* (coauthored, 2020) and *Framing the Environmental Humanities* (coedited, 2018).

ITO Hiromi, poet, author of *Wild Grass on the Riverbank* (2015) and *Killing Kanoko* (2009).

We invite individual and panel proposals. Individual papers should be no more than 20 minutes in length. Please send a 300-word abstract with three to five keywords and a brief biography. For panels of three to four speakers, please send a 500-word abstract with three to five keywords and a one-page CV from the organizer, as well as speaker biographies. Each panel discussion should be under 90 minutes.

Please submit individual and panel proposals to isleea2020@gmail.com by March 10, 2020.

Note: Membership in ASLE (in Japan, Korea, Taiwan, ASEAN, or other regions/countries) is required by the time of registration.