

Nonsensical Love from the Fringes

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The spread of Covid-19 has certainly revealed to us the “true face” of the world as a brutal and illogical place where “anything can happen.” Now we are here, feeling like betrayed folks whose lives have been rewritten singlehandedly. I will never forget the scenery of Shibuya with virtually no-one to be seen, when I went there for an urgent business one weekday during the government-imposed state of emergency. It was a sight that I would translate into witnessing how the daily routine of thousands of people who used to crowd the streets around here only days ago, was instantly corrupted. Who would have imagined that something like this could ever happen? Now how exactly are we supposed to take this situation and deal with it?

When watching some of Yamamoto Atsushi’s video works once again during the pandemic, I noticed some trifling details in the corners of the screen that grabbed my attention. Waterways through fields, electric wires in residential areas, or weeds growing rampant on seedy parking lots – all of them are parts of perfectly familiar suburban landscapes, but as my eyes jumped back and forth between the details and the larger pictures, I understood that these things are exactly what charge Yamamoto’s works with a rich palette of emotions and reality. Seen through the filter of that reality, the microcosm illustrated in Yamamoto’s videos appears not as a fictional place somewhere divorced from the real world, but it looked to me like a part of our very own reality. It contains such figures as a man who oddly exposes the lining of his coat painted with Van Gogh style suns (“Sunny Days in Thailand,” 2013, see page 55); two fellas navigating plushie dogs mounted onto remote-controlled cars on a parking lot (“2dogs,” 2010, see page 6); and a guy who keeps trying to ride a skateboard without wheels (“About the Possibility of Impossibility,” 2008, see page 137). Again, all of them are characters that exist somewhere in this world. It may be “on the fringes,” in a reality that is defined by the trivial matters and details of their everyday, but they certainly do exist.

At the foundation of Yamamoto’s creative work is the question, “In what kind of world are we living?” along with the idea that “‘things that change’ and ‘things that don’t change’ are synonymous. The world keeps changing, and at the same time, it doesn’t change at all. It is a place we are familiar with, yet at once it is something we have never seen. In this ever-transforming world, the acuteness of focusing on those essential things that remain unchanged, is what informs the very basis of Yamamoto’s creativity.

But what is it that enables this naive attitude of continuously paying attention to the “things that don’t

change” in the first place, in a world as cruel and illogical as this? The characters that appear in his videos indicate one methodology that Yamamoto applies in this respect. All of them share qualities of simple sincerity and extreme faith, or in short, something like a “nonsensical love” that remains unshaken no matter what happens (or maybe they just don’t notice). In other words, facing reality with the “nonsensical love” of “people on the fringes,” means perhaps nothing else than simply cherishing the world and accepting it as it is, whatever may happen and how things may change. Such benevolent view of the world, and ways of loving it, is what Yamamoto Atsushi presents to us through his works, and he will continue to mass-produce these videos, in his own corner of the world, no matter what.

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