



THE INSENTIENT COMPANION

Some Thoughts on Dolls, Robots, and Significant Otherness, Sacred and Profane

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What does it mean to speak of dolls, robots, and relationship-simulation games as significant others? A recent revival of interest in notions of Japanese animism has been fueled by post-human concerns in anthropology on the one hand (Tsing 2015) and the so-called ontological turn on the other (Block and Jensen 2013). The argument often made is that there is a continuity between "sacred" forms of imbuing the material with spirit and modern ways of creating things that interact. This paper critically examines these discourses by looking at what kind of otherness is recognized when we speak of "techno-animism," for example. Using my own fieldwork material on disposal and historical material (specifically the *Tsukumogamiki*), I attempt to reverse-engineer an understanding of sentient/non-sentient relationships with reference to Donna Haraway's notion of "companion species" and "significant otherness" (2003).

I shall argue that insentient social others must be understood in a context of what Anne Allison calls "orphanism" (2006) and that we celebrate Japan as a post-humanist utopia at the cost of excluded human others that are deemed not significant enough.

Dr. Fabio Gygi was born and raised in Switzerland, but spent his formative years in Japan, Germany, and England. After receiving an MA in European Ethnology and Japanese Studies from the University of Tübingen, he was awarded a PhD in social anthropology by UCL. Before joining SOAS he spent three years as an assistant professor of sociology at Doshisha University in Kyoto.

This talk is coordinated by Caroline Hirasawa (FLA) for ICC Research Unit "Materialities of the Sacred."