



EPILOGUE

Carol Hayes

The goal of this collection, and the symposium on which it was based, was to explore the Australia–Japan relationship through objects of individual meaning. We hoped that expressing the depth and vibrancy of Australia–Japan cultural interconnections through the concrete and the intimate, would allow us to emotionally as well as intellectually connect to the world that made the object, to think about the value-systems that give the object meaning, and to consider how that meaning has changed as the object moves through space, time and culture.

Each symposium participant identified the object that has shaped them, often becoming instruments of their work or providing them with philosophical points of reflection. Objects can be mundane and ordinary but when imbued with meaning they become inspiring, spiritual and symbolic. As we read through each story and reflect on the significance of their objects we build up a picture of the depth and diversity of the relationship between our two countries.

There is one final story to tell, which ties together some of threads that interweave the stories and objects discussed in the collection. It reminds us that deep immersion in another culture and an understanding how another culture imagines the world is a key to our

own personal development, as demonstrated by the lives and work of the contributors to this book.

Speaking of his journey as a *karateka* practitioner of karate, Ryan van Leent reminds us of how challenging it is to learn something complex. Noting that if you set out to learn a *kata*, with each of the seventy movements in order, it seems impossible, but as you break it down into parts and repeat those parts again and again it becomes achievable. *Karateka* then learn to reassemble the *kata* as a whole and eventually through that process, learn something very complex. When that happens, they can start to drop below the surface of the *kata*.

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Ryan asked us to reflect on the concept of *shu-ha-ri* [守·破·離] that describes the stages of martial arts training. The first stage of *shu* [守]—to obey, abide by the rules, to protect—is the stage when you follow the teachings and do as the expert does with no deviation. Then comes the *ha* [破] state—to disrupt, to break away, to breach—when you start to break away from that one *kata* form and although you are still constrained by the overall pattern you start to explore alternative versions. Finally there is the *ri* [離] stage of mastery—to separate, to be apart, to be distant. In this final stage you detach yourself totally from what was originally taught and perform the *kata* in the way that your heart and mind desires. So after first learning the fundamentals, the *karateka*

starts to explore and move within the uniformity of tradition and then ultimately parts from traditional practice and makes it their own; which we could view as three words, ‘follow’, ‘break’ and ‘make’.

Even after thirty years practising karate, Ryan feels that he has only reached the second stage. He noted that true karate is said to be the way of making unnatural things look natural, and hopes to one day reach the *ri* stage and to be able to use his karate practice to fully express himself while making it look like natural movement. This concept of *shu-ha-ri* provides an important concept of Japanese learning and gives us one example of how deep engagement with Japanese cultural practice can to redefine how we see





ourselves, how we engage with the world and how we learn. It is this deep engagement that bridges the cultural divide.

Celine spoke to the interplay between object and idea in her discussion of the development of the telescope technology that is the focus of her work. Sometime the object comes first and sometime the idea. Celine works with very sophisticated machines, very complex objects that become the tools that change the way we think about the world. Often it begins with a theory that ultimately evolves into an object; in the case of astronomy to give us visual confirmation of abstract theories. Celine reminds us that this can go both ways. Sometimes, we have an astronomer who is interested in observing different types of objects but there is not yet an instrument that can do it. But often the reverse happens. Someone creates a wonderful new instrument that no one has ever used before but as people start using it they discover new things. Then they realise there is no theory for what they are discovering and so the theorists have to go back to the drawing board and think about how to explain what they are seeing. Intercultural contact is like this. Many of the stories in this book explore this sort of exchange where influence and the change it seeks ebb and flow showing how objects and ideas travel across and between times and culture, acquiring meaning along the way.

Ryuhei Nadatani's art practice has deep links to his survival during the 1995 Kobe earthquake. That disaster led him to reflect on the human condition, particularly our isolation. Nadatani studied at The ANU in the early 2000s and Richard Whitely, Head of Glass, ANU School of Art & Design noted in his introduction to Nadatani's keynote, that Nadatani's graduation pieces provided an important reflection on these themes. Made up of precarious stacks of plate glass, Nadatani's graduating work drew on very simple principles. He created towering *tatemono* [buildings] and within these stacks he inserted very intricate labyrinths that culminated in little spaces symbolising rooms. Each space held a little audio speaker. Nadatani created recordings of mundane observations of everyday life, such as 'I went to school', 'my sandwiches were soggy' or 'I had an argument with my boss'. These recordings were then played back through the labyrinths of the glass sculpture and as you approached the towers of glass, you could hear these mundane messages, through these intricate fragile structures. This work provided a simple yet subtle metaphor for human life—its very precariousness—as if parts of the whole structure could all fall over at any moment with just a push or, perhaps, an earthquake. This work created in Australia was born of Nadatani's lived experience bridging two cultures to speak



to human existence, of a life that is a piling up, an accumulation of pieces that are interconnected, strong yet fragile.

The political and economic engagement of the Australia–Japan relationship is built on strong cultural and people-to-people links just like Nadatani’s. Their lives and stories provide testament to a deep cultural engagement and demonstrate that we decode our experiences as much through objects as through text. We hope that this collection serves as a reminder of the pivotal role played by practitioners in culture. It is not enough that objects simply exist, it is through practice, provocation, personal association and provenance that they come to hold meaning.

Bruce Miller, retired Australian Ambassador to Japan, on the day of the symposium quoted from Ian Buruma’s recent publication, *A Tokyo Romance*, which itself cites late Pierre Ryckmans’ (pen name Simon Leys) idea that, “Cultural initiation entails metamorphosis, and we cannot learn any foreign values if we cannot accept the risk of being transformed by what we learn”. This book is a living demonstration of such transformation in practice.



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