

# “Common Sense” and Encounters after the “Capital-Nation-State” in the Digital Age: Nakamura Yūjirō vs. Karatani Kōjin in their Philosophies of Imagination

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## Abstract:

This paper picks up the philosophies of Nakamura Yūjirō (1925-2017) and Karatani Kōjin (1941-), both of whom are known as prominent thinkers in contemporary Japan, although each of them seems to show us quite different philosophical viewpoints. Although Karatani once inexorably criticized Nakamura’s interpretation concerning Nishida Kitarō’s philosophy, their seemingly opposite, but meaningful views never entered into the dialogical phase. In this paper, we examine the significance of a possible viewpoint that we could have otherwise gained from this unperformed dialogue, if these two philosophers had actually had some philosophical discussions over Nishida’s philosophy. In doing so, this paper tries to establish that we can elicit a critical viewpoint of capitalism in terms of “common sense” as one of the main issues of Nakamura’s philosophy through revisiting his argument and grasping its meaning beyond the communally bordered implications of the concept. Furthermore, this paper emphasizes the nature of our “imagination” composed of encounters with differences, and this sense of imagination is now in crisis in the age of digitalization. In this sense, we can see the validity of Nakamura’s philosophy of “common sense” in contemporary capitalism.

**Keywords:** *common sense, imagination, “capital-nation-state”, encounter, digitalization*

## Introduction

This paper focuses on the argument of a Japanese philosopher, Nakamura Yūjirō, and attempts to develop the notion of a “common sense<sup>1</sup>” as a critical view of capitalism through examining Karatani Kōjin’s criticism of his argument on the “deconstruction of Nishida Kitarō”. In what sense can we say that the notion of a “common sense” is critical of capitalism? This paper tries to illustrate a contrast

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1 “Common sense” in this paper is a term coined by Nakamura that indicates an apperception closer to its concept in the philosophy of Kant.

between Karatani's and Nakamura's conceptions of imagination and emphasize the validity of the latter for the age of digitalized capitalism. In the first section, I pick up Karatani's criticism of Nakamura's argument over the historical problem of the Kyoto School's philosophy that is related to commitments on the Second World War and point out the problem that Nakamura didn't respond to Karatani's criticism. In the second section, Nakamura's philosophy is reexamined in terms of how he could have responded to Karatani. The concept of the "imagination" is the main axis to grasp this comparison. Then the third section is an attempt to develop Nakamura's philosophy of a "common sense" into a critical viewpoint of capitalism through comparison with Karatani in the sense that "common sense" is revitalized by encounters with differences and externalized by contemporary capitalism, or as Jodi Dean calls it, "communicative capitalism".

## 1. Karatani's Criticism of Nakamura Yūjirō's View of Nishida's Philosophy

Who is Nakamura Yūjirō? In Japan, he is known as a multifaceted philosopher who started as a researcher of Pascal, was a successor to Nishida Kitarō's philosophy, is known for his considerations on "common sense", as a researcher of French philosophies who translated Bergson and Foucault's books into Japanese, for his anthropological investigation into the Balinese religious culture and so on. Among all of these, he is relatively well known as an interpreter of Nishida's philosophy in the international context, because he once joined in lectures of the *École normale* and the Centre Pompidou (Nakamura 1987).

In English, we can find John Krummel's prominent introduction to his philosophy. He sums up Nakamura's philosophy over the view of Nishida's philosophy and "common sense" in the following way: Firstly, "common sense" is "the horizon of self-evidence that shapes a certain layer of thought and behavior within a given time, society, culture, etc.", but secondly, it is a sense that would be strongly affected by the destabilization of social order and its self-evidence caused by social transformations, hence "common sense" is potentially exposed to the "extraordinary" (Nakamura 1979=2000: 280-282). In this sense, focusing on "common sense" is suggested as the appropriate argument for the postmodern era in which social integration was dismantled. Consequently, human beings need to rethink their own framework of existence in order to understand and experience our collective social life in terms of a "*common sense*" (Nakamura 1979=2000: 280). What is more, this "common sense" is mediated by various communicational devices and the context constituted by them, because "*common sense*" is not only concerned with living in socially common contexts, but also living with each concrete *body*. In a word, Nakamura shows us the view that our bodily lives and social imaginations are surrounded by collective frameworks and technological conditions. In other words, his philosophy based on a "common sense" captures human commonality under the dyadic view between physical and sensual levels and the shared significance of our social lives (Krummel 2015: 78-79).

Looking at the Japanese history of thought after the Second World War, Obata Seigo agrees somewhat with Nakamura's argument and places him as a kind of "communitarian" against liberalism in Japan. According to this, his view of a "common sense" is an antithesis against intellectuals who gave theoretical foundations for the postwar democratization, and Obata argues that liberal political theories after the war such as Maruyama Masao's became detached from the popular culture and the Japanese communitarians emphasized the persisting power of the "common sense" as a "communal sense", R. Beiner argued (Obata 2017: 39-41; Beiner 1983). In this schema, Nakamura is one of the

critical philosophers who focus on the “Shomin” (庶民: common people) and the communal background in which they are embedded.

However, the above way of categorizing his philosophy could generate an oversight of its wide-ranging potential. In what follows, this potentiality is measured. For this, it is meaningful to focus on the criticism by Karatani Kōjin of Nakamura, because we can find different significances of Nakamura’s philosophy through Karatani’s fundamental criticism, which tackles the historical problem of the Kyoto School and Nakamura’s connection with it.

Karatani set out to criticize the Kyoto School by investigating Ferdinand de Saussure and his criticism against existing linguistics. Saussure attempted to destabilize every border of language and “reduce” linguistic meanings into phonetic elements and their combinations in the phenomenological sense so that he could show that the “langue” (linguistic system) is composed of only “differences” among these combinations. Moreover, his “reduction” of language leads us to blur borders between nationally officialized languages and other unofficial “dialects”. “In natural language, people can find only dialects. [...] However, the state needs to choose, for many needs, a dialect from a numerous number of the whole [dialects] as an instrument for communication, which the situation designates” (Saussure 1972: 43 [the lecture given on 1910/11/11]). Namely, existing linguistics before Saussure took it for granted that officialized languages were privileged objects for language analysis although they had been only one of the dialects among many.

The point here is the issue of premising a nationalized language that loses sight of the contingency of linguistic meanings and cultural borders. For Karatani, Nakamura’s philosophy of language also engages in this issue, because he substantializes the officialized and bordered “Japanese” and takes no notice of the political nature of language itself. Following Karatani, Nakamura relies on Nishida’s philosophy and the linguistics of Tokieda Motoki and replicates the intensification of nationalized language. Tokieda is known for his criticism of Saussure’s theory of language from the view that his theory lacks a subjective factor, which means that a person learns their own language in each concrete context of a meaningful world and Saussure ignores “processes” of learning a language in this context. Tokieda says that “[...] not that the ‘language’ itself has a boundary nature, but the universality of habits of linguistic acts maintains the integrity of ‘language’” (Tokieda 1941=2007: 101). However, according to Karatani, Tokieda’s criticism of Saussure is not appropriate, because Saussure grasps language completely differently through “persistently start[ing] from ‘speech subjects’” (Karatani 1993a: 71-72).

Nonetheless, the important point here is that the “subject” for Tokieda is the one in the “place of nothingness” of Nishida Kitarō’s philosophy (Karatani 1993a: 72). In Tokieda’s linguistic theory, the “subjective” nature is ascribed to functions of “‘Ji’ (clitic; 辭) that does not have sematic contents such as particles and verbal auxiliaries, but expresses emotional values” (“words of ideas”) in Japanese grammar. The “words of ideas” here is counterposed to “‘Shi’ (conceptual words; 詞) that have clearly demonstrative sematic contents” (“words of concepts”)<sup>2</sup> (Tokieda 1941=2007: 260). In a word, “Ji” is more strongly connected with keys and sounds of voices than the conceptual grasping of things. Based on this distinction, Tokieda stresses the roles of “Ji” in the structure of Japanese that enfold concepts (“Shi”) in their embraces, in comparison to the structure of western languages, which bridge concepts

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2 For example, while a “Hana (flower: 花)” is an object as the conceptual word, one can express the affection of beauty of the flower by saying “Hana-yo” with “ji”. This might be equivalent to the expression “Wow (ah), flower” (Tokieda 1941=2007: 266).

with “be” as the copula (Tokieda 1941=2007: 268). In Japanese, while “Shi” as connected with objective demonstrations is written in Chinese characters (kanji; 漢字), Japanese syllabary characters (hiragana; ひらがな) correspond to “Ji”.

In “the ‘logics of place’ and the common sense” (1984=1987), Nakamura sheds light on the common nature between Tokieda’s theory of Japanese and Nishida’s “place of nothingness” (83-84). Nishida reached the view of “absolute nothingness” that works on a deeper level encompassing material phenomena and conscious acts of grasping them. In doing so, he enabled us to comprehend the world as *events* of contiguous appearances made of synchronous collaborations between things and consciousnesses. Hence objects and consciousness are not opposed to each other. According to Nakamura, Nishida’s philosophical view “happens to [show] the ‘logics of Japanese’” and stands on the common ground with Tokieda’s theory, because Tokieda characterizes traditional Japanese as the “language as events”, in which language is not an instrument to objectivize things, but things appear *alongside* expressions in the “place”. From Tokieda’s view of language as the process, the dyadic relationships between “Ji” and “Shi” are open to the “place of nothingness” that assumes no particular meanings and encompasses our expressive acts based on collaborations between things and consciousness.

Looking at Nishida’s argument on “place”, the “nothingness” that encompasses our conscious activities based on “place” has to be grasped as having a nature that “can only be predicative in every respect and cannot be a subject” (Nishida 1987: 279). This stipulation goes against the logic of the substratum by Aristotle who argued: “that which is a subject and cannot be a predicate”. Here, let us assume the case that some specific things are (defined by) general conceptions such as “I am a writer”. While the “I” here is the particular, a “writer” is the general. Also, I am a human being, smoker, scholar and so on. Clearly, general predicates express the “I” through diverse predicates. Here, on the one hand, predicates can make networks infinitely. On the other hand, the “I” cannot be fully stipulated by the infinitude of predicates. In the above sense, consciousness (the “I”) and objects (predicates) are not opposed. Rather, the act of producing predicative networks is itself the condition of consciousness that “cannot be a predicate” in Aristotle’s sense. Also, the “Ji” in Japanese can be seen as a function of the finiteness of linguistic expressions opened to the infinitude of the predicative network. Thus, Nishida’s predicative logic of the “place of nothingness” directs our attention to operations that can only be sources of expressive activities, while Aristotle’s logic based on the subject is the transcendental substance beyond any conscious judgments. Using this logic based on the predicative, Nishida identifies it with Japanese (Nishida 1966: 142-143).

However, although Nakamura suggests the close relationships between Tokieda’s linguistic theory and the philosophy of Nishida under the predicative logic, Karatani views the “logic of Japanese” suspecting that Tokieda clearly intended to apply Nishida’s philosophy of the “place” and justify the universality of the “logic” applicable to other Asian regions in the situation that the conference on “overcoming modernity” took place in July, 1942. In other words, the philosophy and linguistics of the “place” is to be the ideology that has an affinity with the “Great East Asia Co-prosperity Sphere” centered on the Japanese Emperor. For Karatani, Nakamura’s interpretation of the “logic of Japanese” bleaches the political color of imperial expansionism, aspiring for the universalization of the officialized national language. I used the term “bleaches” here in a harsh sense, because Karatani inexorably criticizes Nakamura’s arbitrary connecting of Nishida’s and Tokieda’s arguments as “ahistorical” and “deceitful”.

Nakamura did not respond to this criticism. This is intriguing, because both unfolded each argument on the historical significance of Nishida’s philosophy at the same period. With hindsight,

Nakamura’s main concern was funneled into the concern about expanding the possibility of Nishida’s view on the “place of nothingness” through incorporating new knowledges that became accessible in the 1980s and 1990s. He has already tried to widen the range of the logic into other academic fields in *Nishida Kitarō I*. While he aims to link the “place of nothingness” with Tokieda there, he also tries to find out this logic in the thinking of schizophrenia patients (Nakamura 1987: 86-94). For instance, in this work, he interprets the “paleologic” argued by Silvano Arieti in terms of the predicative logic (Arieti 1976: 67ff). The logic of schizophrenia works in the following “proposition”: “I am a virgin. The Virgin Mary was a virgin. I am the Virgin Mary”. In schizophrenic thinking, this “proposition” that is nonsense to a normal logical thinker has a distinctive reality. In the “proposition”, the predicative “(is) virgin” makes “I” and “the Virgin Mary” attracted to each other. According to Nakamura, we can understand this “proposition” as a “thinking integrated through an unknown and another dimension of the predicative” (85-86), and if we apply this thinking to “thinkers (speculators)”, predicative identifications can be interpreted as their struggles to confront “vivid” realities and synthesize them with full reflexivity (Nakamura 1983=2001: 94).

Furthermore, looking at his works after the “deconstruction of Nishida”, he attempts to develop Nishida’s philosophy into a *Predicative World and Institution*, but he does not refer to the relationships between Tokieda and Nishida. It seems that he emphasizes the alternative nature of “predicative logic” for knowledge, rather than the “logic of Japanese” (Nakamura 1998: 37). Briefly put, this attempt evolved into his idiosyncratic theory about the ecological cosmos as “rhythmic oscillation”<sup>3</sup>. Nonetheless, his reaction to the criticism from Karatani remains unknown.

Does this attitude of Nakamura indicate his intellectual insincerity? This paper does not judge which of the two philosophers we can justify. The main focus of this paper is to speculate a horizon that could be opened if the un-attempted dialogue had actually taken place. In the next section, we will see that there is not only a cross-purpose, but also a shared issue over the “imagination”. In doing so, we can develop this un-attempted dialogue into a broader social context.

## 2. Bridging between Nakamura and Karatani on the Concept of Imagination

In what follows, first, Karatani’s understanding of Nakamura is critically examined. Second, I try to reformulate an issue that was interrupted by Nakamura’s failure to respond to Karatani and focus on the concept of “imagination” revisiting Karatani’s *Structure of World History*. Third, I try to explore the issue of “imagination” in that the role of “imagination” has been transformed by digitalization in contemporary capitalism and we need to differentiate the role of the imagination from its modern form.

As we saw, Karatani’s criticism of Nakamura was in respect to the latter’s “ahistorical” connecting of Nishida and Tokieda. Looking at the historical context of his criticism, we can see philosophical movements to reevaluate Nishida’s philosophy and the historical issue of “overcoming modernity” in postwar Japan. In the comment that Karatani wrote for one of the great Marxist writers Hiromatsu Wataru’s *Considering “Overcoming Modernity”*, Karatani defines the movement of

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3 Although his view of “rhythmic oscillation” seems to need closer investigation, this paper has to tackle the topic of the “common sense” mainly to develop his argument on a more comprehensive level. Nakamura seeks to find out resonant connections between our language activities based on the subjective logics and quantum material oscillations in natural phenomena, especially in his exploration for rhythm, which is reconceptualized from the argument on the “place” and “common sense” (Nakamura 1991).



reevaluation as a recurrence of a Japanese ideological interest of overcoming modernity as westernization and as a historically negative legacy<sup>4</sup>. This skepticism is similar in nature to the dispute over the relationships between Heidegger's philosophy and Nazism (Lacoue-Labarthe 2002).

However, we can reconsider that Nakamura's project of the "deconstruction of Nishida's philosophy" also lives up to the above historical requirement of confronting the negative legacy. Here, we have to cast an eye to his critical view of Nishida's philosophy from the perspective of its "ahistorical" nature. While Nishida argues that a person as a historical being does not have to be defined in terms of "the material", Nakamura doubts this idea of a historical being: "When it comes to the relationships between historicity and the material, the human mind and will can have a strong and real power through being objectified, institutionalized, and materialized" (Nakamura 1987: 252-253). From Nishida's view, a person lives and experiences a transcendental awareness of history in the "eternal present" at each moment. The "absolute nothingness" is at the root of this awareness.

However, for Nakamura, Nishida "too easily and unlimitedly" alleges the superiority of "oriental culture" and the "place of Japanese culture" over the western ontology from the above philosophical viewpoint (Nakamura 1987: 240-241). Also, Nakamura casts a critical light on Nishida's solipsism in his philosophy of the "place of nothingness" and "awareness" in the sense that Nishida focuses only on the individual awareness of vital operations of the "place" and "excludes and vitiates others" (Nakamura 1998: 52-53). For this reason, Nakamura emphasizes that the logic of the "place of nothingness" needs to be compensated by institutional mediations in social relationships with others that enable the "place" to be materialized in multiple ways. From his critical consideration of the philosophical essence in Nishida's philosophy, we cannot easily accept Karatani's criticism against Nakamura's "ahistorical" argument that leads to the ideology of Kyoto School's commitments to the "the Great East Asia Co-prosperity Sphere" (Karatani 1993b: 97-98).

Here, the main issue is: Why did Nakamura introduce the institutional mediation and the view of others to the "place of nothingness"? As we have seen above, the "place of nothingness" in Nishida's sense implies the "pure experience" that infinite differences of beings themselves are interrelated at once and in the unity of the "place". However, this state of experience is Nishida's solipsistic encompassing of infinite connections of everything excluding life under an institution with others. Thus, the question of how to confront the differences with others under an institution can be found in Nakamura's criticism against Nishida. Thus, encounters with differences are thought of as a fundamental condition for human lives in Nakamura's view.

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4 The tide of reconsidering "overcoming modernity" in postwar Japan has been since the latter 1950s. According to Karatani, reflections on pre-war Japan became consciously underway at the moment of establishment of the so-called "1955 system" in which two conservative parties, the Democratic Party and the Liberal Party, coalesced. In addition, the tide of getting back to Asia was strengthened in the 1960s by the New Left movements that aimed to overcome classical Marxism as a modernist ideology and make solidarities with Vietnam and China under ideals such as the emancipation of Vietnam and Maoism. Hiromatsu pointed out that these criticisms of the modernist ideology and inclination to the return to Asia had a common nature with the issue of "overcoming modernity" committed by the Kyoto School, the Japanese Romanticism, and the Literary Circle. Furthermore, Karatani emphasized that his criticism is applicable to the social situation in 1980s Japan, when the issue of overcoming western modernity became a strong momentum through post-modernism based on French philosophies (post-structuralism). In effect, various "reevaluations of studies on Japan and 'oriental philosophies' became a wide stream in this historical context. Cf. Karatani, "Comment on Overcoming Modernity", in Hiromatsu Wataru, *On "Overcoming Modernity"* (1980=1989, Kodansya), pp.263-372.

Keeping this in mind, let us visit Karatani’s idea of differences. This is the second point here. First, we can find his idea of differences in his interpretation of Saussure. As seen before, Saussure shows that our language systems (*langue*) are only the systems of differences that are formed by different syllables composed of phonemes. This point of view makes visible to us the political nature of understanding grammatical structures and these historical schemes on the premise of already officialized writings (*écriture*) (Karatani 1993a: 58-59).

According to Karatani, the “parole that Saussure tries to see is multitudes of languages as *idiome* (idiom) that have blurred borderlines”, and “‘langue’ is not *écriture*, nor *parole*, nor even national language” (Karatani 1993a: 64). Conversely, when we regard language as something “normative”, it can be easily connected with an applause of the “national spirit” (Karatani 1993a: 65). However, “even if every national language dies, *langue* never dies. [...] *Langue* is *langue*, as long as the human is human” (Karatani 1993a: 66-67). In the theme of relationships between differences and an institution with others, the “normative” idea of *langue* forms our institutionalized reality oppressing the reality of differences without the normalization.

However, secondly, what we have to focus on is a shift in his emphasis from differences to commonality in our social relationships, from his investigation of Saussure to that of Karatani’s main work, *Structure of World History*. In this book, he captures historical processes of politico-economic societies in terms of the “mode of exchange” instead of the view of the distinction between “infra/superstructure” in the existing Marxist theoretical premise. Through this replacement, we can recognize the real power of the nation-state that has been treated as a mere ideological fallacy in classical Marxist theories. He expresses the capitalist society in which the nation-state also has its real power as the “capital-nation-state” through the shared idea of a social reality. In the view of the “capital-nation-state”, we cannot discern material powers from ideal powers.

He focuses on the concept of “intercourse (*Verkehr*)” in Marx’s *German Ideology* and emphasizes that Marx explicated his criticism of capitalism not from the productive-power-based (productionist) point of view, but from the view of “exchange” as “intercourse” (Karatani 2014: 14). Simply put, the “mode of exchange” is a concept which explains that social modes of allocations of political, social, and economic values in each historical phase are formed through certain modes of material exchanges and political and economic hierarchies.

From this view of the “mode of exchange”, the historical transformation of the social model can be staged in social modes based on “mode of exchange A” that is based on a gift economy, “mode of exchange B” that is centered on the expropriation of wealth by a centralized authority, and “mode of exchange C” that is the society of industrial capitalism based on free exchange in the market collaborating with the state’s power of guaranteeing social security. Additionally, he insists that the “mode of exchange D” in the future has to overcome the “capital-nation-state” concept and achieve a global reciprocity based on individual liberties (Karatani 2014: 5-7).

Focusing here on “mode of exchange C”, constituted by the “capital-nation-state”, the concept of imagination seems to be placed on the central factor to grasp the social relationships under this trinity. Karatani shows the “Borromean rings (knot)<sup>5</sup>” formed by the rings of “capital”, “nation”, and “state”

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5 In the English translated version of *Structure of World History*, it is translated as “Borromean rings” (Karatani 2014: 220). However, considering the nature of the “capital-nation-state”, if one of the three elements is excluded, the others are also disconnected. This paper employs the term “Borromean knot” following Jacques Lacan’s *Séminaire* (seminar) that showed the “Borromean knot” (*nœud borroméen*) of “the Symbolic”, “the Imaginary”, and “the Real” (Lacan 2002).

(Karatani 2014: 220-221). In this knot, “nation” is in the place of imagination. Moreover, according to this trinity, “state”, “capital” and “nation” respectively correspond to “understanding (*Verstand*)”, “sensibility (*Sinnlichkeit*)”, and “imagination (*Einbildung*)” based on the philosophy of Immanuel Kant (Fig.1). Karatani points out that the root of this correspondence can be found in the historical context of the eighteenth century when the political order based on the “nation” as the “imagined community” (Benedict Anderson) became a social reality, and Kant strictly distinguished “understanding”, “sensibility” and “imagination” through his critical philosophies in this period. The important thing for Karatani here is that Kant regarded the “imagination” as the intermediary role between “understanding” and “sensibility”, and in this view, the “nation” is a collective phenomenon to “imaginatively recover” reciprocal relationships that were lost in the emergent state-capital order. In the next historical phase, “mode of exchange D”, this “imagination” has to be released from the “Borromean knot” to a basis for reciprocal relationships on behalf of commodity exchanges in terms of the “reason” in Kant’s sense.

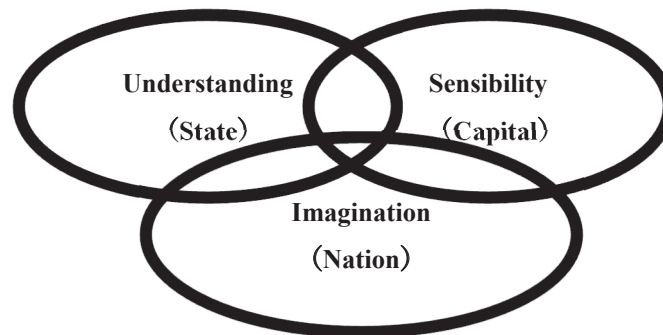


Figure 1. The Borromean knot from *Structure of World History*

Here, we can notice the link between his argument of Saussurian linguistics and the “imagination” beyond the “nation”. In his *Marx, the Core of its Possibility*, Karatani grasps Marx’s argument on the relationships between the “relative form of value” and “equivalent form of value” in the way that the latter form, which is, simply put, the money-form as the signifier for values of other commodities, is derived from the former form as if differences among commodities latently include the general form of value in a Saussurian way. This means that questions about “what makes languages as they are” and “what makes commodities as they are” is structurally the same, because both meanings (values) of words and commodities are formed only through the difference itself that necessarily creates the fetishism of these values as natural existences (Karatani 1978=1990: 30-31).

However, we can see in *Structure of World History* that he stresses more the “reciprocal principle” collectively represented than differences. Thus, there is a shift in emphasis from difference to reciprocity<sup>6</sup>. Of course, we can understand that reciprocity is composed of differences in the direction of exchange. Nonetheless, it is still unclear how the imagination integrates differences in a

6 Karatani emphasizes Kant’s Enlightenment as the political struggle. “Kant did not substantially think of the ‘global civil society’ nor deny belonging to some community. He only said that one should be a global civilian in one’s thinking and actions. In effect, to be a global civilian cannot be possible without each struggle (Enlightenment) in each community” (Karatani 2004: 159). This Kantian drive of Karatani became apparent especially from the 2000s.



particular way. In what sense can the “reciprocal principle” recur in world history? The only thing we can see from Karatani’s argument is, seemingly, that the “nation” as the “imagination” is actually fictitious and there is another authentic way of collective “imagination”.

Here, the interesting fact for us is that the issue of imagination in the above sense is also the central theme of Nakamura’s philosophy of the “common sense”. Thus, based on the above-discussed view of Karatani’s imagination, we can compare it with Nakamura’s viewpoint of imagination in the following section.

### 3. Imagination as Encounters with Differences and the Age of the “Capital-Digital-State”

The main point in the following argument is to understand the dynamic operation of the imagination that integrates differences. We can find an explanation of this operation in Nakamura’s philosophy of the “common sense”. This “common sense” does not simply mean the generally shared idea among society, but the fact that our sense of the differences between every being *is* the experience of being connected to the whole at the same time. For Nakamura, this identity of differences and the whole is the work of our imagination based on the “common sense”.

In effect, Nakamura’s philosophy has to be called the philosophy of imagination, because one of his works *On Common Sense* deals with imagination in physical and institutional terms and tries to reformulate the problems of imagination once suggested in *Logics of Productive Imagination* (1939-1946) written by Miki Kiyoshi who was one of the central students of and critics against Nishida.

The key to understanding his philosophy of the imagination is to grasp how sensible differences are integrated by the “common sense” and how this integrative power appears in our reality through language, which Nakamura explains in terms of the paradigm compared with the syntagm.

As for the first issue, according to this work, the topic of the “common sense” in the history of philosophy has long been argued since Aristotle conceived the term “*sensus communis*”, and in the seventeenth century, Descartes placed the sense in the pineal organ inside the brain and this enables us to understand the sense physically. Based on Descartes’ *Treatise of Man*, Nakamura points out that “the common sense is an intermediary between sensibility and reason and the place of imagination” (Nakamura 1979=2000: 213)<sup>7</sup>. However, Descartes degraded the work of “imagination” comparing it with the rational judgement of external objects, because it depends on bodily sensibility and leads our recognition to fallacies<sup>8</sup> (Descartes 1644=1983: 32-35 (§70-75)).

From Descartes’ view, imagination is placed as the intermediary between rational thinking and sensibility. Nakamura notes that while the “common sense” is “a sort of a sense”, it is “beyond each discrete sense, that is, each single sense of the five senses” and “operates to correlate, marshal, and lead them to a higher integration” (Nakamura 1979=2000: 200). If this operation does not work well,

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7 According to Descartes, the pineal organ is a “seat (*siège*) of the imagination and the *sens commun*” (Descartes 1664=1996: 176-177).

8 In *Passions of the Soul*, imagination as an intermediate position between reason and sensibility is captured as the place of struggle between them. “Every struggle that is generally imagined as being placed between the lower part of the mind as so-called the sensible and the upper part of the rational, or more precisely, between the natural desire and the will, are placed in movements caused by oppositions in the [pineal] gland between the [animal] spirits of the body and the will of the mind” (Descartes 1649=1996: 44 (§47)).

the operation of differentiating discrete senses under the integrative function does not function well either and this makes it difficult for us to adjust to our surrounding environment. Conversely, we can discern two phases for healthy operations of the “common sense” under the condition of a well-balanced relationship between the differentiation and integration of our individual senses.

The so-called five senses are integrated and vitalized in mutual connections by the operations of the “common sense” (Nakamura 1979=2000: 200). In this case, we can understand that this well-balanced integration and differentiation of various senses is enabled by our contacts with and exploration of the environment, and conversely this enables us to propel them. Secondly, based on the first operation of the “common sense”, we can find out the way for human beings “as individuals and as a species to order various senses with a norm and a model that were gradually established in the [first] way” (Nakamura 1979=2000: 200-201). The first way is concerned with the imagination, while so is the second way with ethics based on reason.

This way of defining the imagination has to be distinguished from Kant’s view of imagination, regardless of the “reproductive” or “productive” imagination, that is placed between intellectual understanding and sensibility and defined in relation to the limits of subjective recognition of the naturally necessary law (Kant 1787=1998: 192-206). Conversely, for Nakamura, the “imagination” is concerned with the physical dimension of a human being. Thus, whether we can make the “imagination” productive or not depends highly on our ability to connect physical activities with our surrounding ecology including other people. Kimura Bin, who is a Japanese psychopathologist and contemporary of Nakamura, addresses the “common sense” and defines it as the “operation of holistic engagements of humans with the world” and a “sort of sensitive ability that gives a fundamental accessibility to humans and the world”<sup>9</sup> (Kimura 1970; Nakamura 1979=2000: 46). Also, this aspect of the “imagination” penetrated by the human body has more affinity with a particular community against the universal world, because this physical and imaginative status of human beings enables socializing among certain members through sharing particular ways of adaptation to the ecology involving a common feeling (Nakamura 1979=2000: 202-203).

Thus, our physical lives based on “common sense” are formed by our co-operation with the surrounding ecology, which makes our sensible differences to the ecology balanced and patterned. Furthermore, this integration of sensible differences is embodied in our languages. This is related to the second question. In the case of Nakamura, he focused on the relationships between the syntagm and the paradigm of language expressions in the Saussurian argument. While the syntagm means sentence relations that form a logical continuity of their contexts, the paradigm means possible choices for each word. In this contrast, Nakamura ascribes the work of the “common sense” to the latter, and describes it as the work of our patterned ways of integrating different things into a whole figure of the surrounding ecology (Nakamura 1979=2000: 205ff). His emphasis on the paradigm here is clearly consonant with the predicative logic as we have seen in the first section.

From the above, we can say that the “imagination” is composed of the predicative integration of

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9 Moreover, we can pick up the striking instance for the relationships between the expansive human body and metaphors in the theory of colors (chromatics). Nakamura focuses on the chromatics of Goethe and questions how our senses of sights and colored visions to external objects, lights and darkness, forms and colors are interrelated. Through this kind of exploration, he grasps the dynamics of appearances of “forms” of things with colors, and it implies that concepts of colors are metaphorical to make vital phenomena in the world tangible (Nakamura 1991: Chap.4 and 9; Nakamura 2000).

sensible differences. However, this integration can never be fixed, because the “imagination” is the continuing process of recalibrating the ratio of differences. These processes take place through encounters with unfamiliar things. For example, philosophy is one of the activities for producing encounters. Nakamura says that “the work of philosophy is probably to recognize an analogy among things that are distant and seemingly unsimilar at first glance” (Nakamura 1979=2000: 292). In other words, “an analogy among things” can be possible through finding out relationships between predicative networks and the “I” based on our surrounding ecologies.

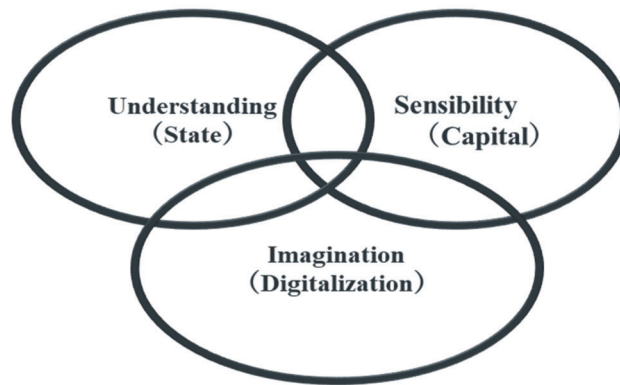


Figure 2. The Borromean knot in the digital age

Getting back to the main issue, we can think that the “imagination” is fundamentally encounters to (re)form relationships with our surrounding ecologies. The “nation” is only one way among other *predicative* integrations. Moreover, we are witnessing the new phase of the “Borromean knot” in digitalizing society today. Thus, we can revise the “Borromean knot” to the form shown in Figure 2.

From this revised schema, it becomes obvious that the capital and the state depend on certain ways of controlling our encounters and socio-economic activities are now increasingly dependent on innovative technologies of information. Furthermore, the digitalization of society is not only reformulating models of the capital and the state, but also replacing our imagination based on encounters with digital devices<sup>10</sup>.

This is the social transformation that Jodi Dean calls “communicative capitalism” (Dean 2002; 2009). “Communicative capitalism” is a form of political economy based on the collection of a great amount of individual data such as the huge companies of platformers (Google, Amazon, Facebook, and Apple) collect, which state governments utilize for their security and elections as we saw in 2018 in the case of the Cambridge Analytica scenario, which had obtained personal information from Facebook that President Donald Trump then made use of for his election campaign in 2016.

Simply put, in this politico-economic situation, the relationships between the state and the capital become interdependent through digital technologies, and our personalities are preserved as objectified data through algorithmic analysis of personal data, which can identify individuals with chains of *dividual* data. This is a quite different form of regulating collectivity based on the idea of the “average

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10 The term “digitalization” should be discerned from the “digitization”. However, unlike the distinction employed in spheres of business (Brynjolfsson and McAfee 2014; Gobble 2018), “digitalization” here takes account of the socialization of digital innovations that have huge impacts on our ways of communication, behavior, thinking and relationships beyond the economic sphere.

man” (Rouvroy and Berns 2013). Against this digitalizing momentum, Dean puts her theoretical stress on the importance of an egalitarian collectivity that can be compatible with the distinctiveness of individuals (Dean 2016). Nonetheless, we also have to speculate on a condition for the dialectic relationships between collectivity and individuality, although we need to rethink a possible way of combining them. The perspective of the “common sense” is the philosophical view for it, because the main point of the perspective is the relationships between sensible diversifications and their integrity, as we have seen that the “common sense” is the operation to integrate sensible processes into the imagination.

However, the place of the “imagination” in the “Borromean knot” is being replaced by digitalization that mediates and changes the relationships between the state and the capital. Let us call this the “capital-digital-state”. In this “capital-digital-state”, how can we find our ways of making the “imagination” based on Nakamura’s philosophy? If we need to elaborate the compatible way of collectivity and individuality, we should also recalibrate the relationships between the “common sense” and various sensibilities. Especially now, this issue seems to be imminent, because in the “capital-digital-state”, while it becomes more difficult to encounter with others, repeated searches for information with individual devices become autotelic as Mackenzie Wark depicts (Wark 2017: 153). Here we can find the loss of the “common sense”, by which the sensible differences in each person are left un-calibrated among each other. The action of the “common sense” is now being replaced by the technologies that form the digital ecology surrounding us. Physical sensibilities are laid bare to the digital technologies in this situation. In other words, users’ accounts for some search engines such as Google that is tracked by an algorithm can help each user get a patterned way of sensible stimulations.

Here, the integrative action of the “common sense” is replaced by this digital technology, so long as users can contribute by giving their attention to certain websites and advertisements. In this sense, it can be said that the digital economy set forth above disables us from making the surrounding ecology and body interrelated. Furthermore, the process of the replacement of the “common sense” by digital devices will be strengthened in the age of COVID-19, because our opportunities to access differences in social environments are more and more dependent on digital devices for communication. All the above things can lead us to the loss of the imagination.

Thus, from the above discussion, the “Borromean knot” in digitalization means the algorithmic substitutions of human’s sensitive lives. This is the result from the process of the “knot” in Figure 2. Hence, one of the central issues in our age can be: How can we reconstruct our imagination through the recovery of the “common sense”?

Figure 3, “the emancipation of encounters from the “Borromean knot” based on the encounter model, shows a possible schema to tackle this question from the perspective of this paper based on Nakamura’s philosophy. An encompassing circle surrounding the “Borromean knot” is added to Figure 3. It depicts the “place” in Nishida’s sense outside the system of the “Borromean knot”, in which people reconstruct interfaces between the human body and social institutions. In other words, in the present situation of digitalization, while the previous sphere for a collective imagination has been substituted, it can open a new sphere for the imagination. In Figure 3, the encompassing circle as the “place” is the new sphere.

Is it possible that we open the “place” outside the “Borromean knot”, in which the interplay between the human body and its surrounding ecology plays a central role in the reciprocity? There are no clear answers in this paper. However, this question appears to be imminently important through my attempt to compare Nakamura with Karatani in this paper. Therefore, the following part of this paper

argues the significance of this question to the end.

Firstly, thinking of the “place” outside the “Borromean knot” in terms of physical and ecological interplay lead us to recapture the Kantian formulae of reason and ethics as is shown in *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* (1785=1997) that: “So act that you treat humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of any other, always at the same time as an end, never merely as a means” (Kant 1997: xxii, italic removed). Kant formulates here an ethical imperative as the universalizable axiom. This axiom obviously premises the relationships between the self and the other as autonomous agents. However, if we take the physical dimension of human agency into account as discussed above, we need to admit that any other has their own way of sensing the world and making each “common sense”. In other words, a “person” becomes a “person” through depending on interrelations with their surrounding ecology. Thus, for an alternative reasonable and ethical view, we need to deepen the Kantian axiom into the way that can regard personal processes of making sensible order “always at the same time as an end, never merely as a means”.

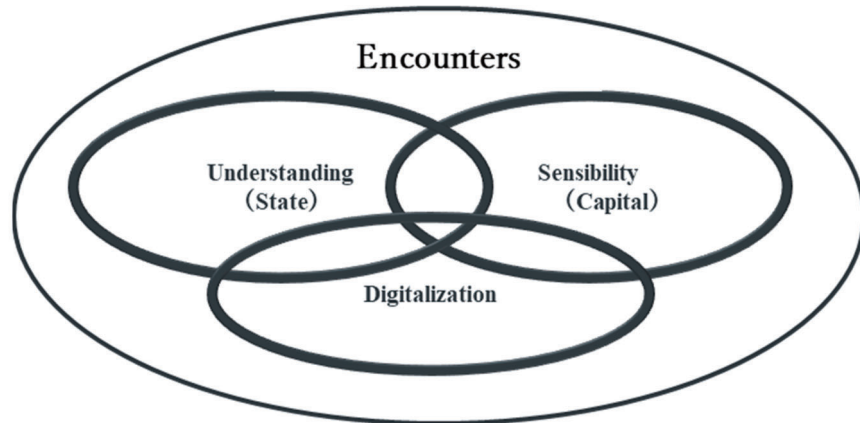


Figure 3. The emancipation of encounters from the “Borromean ring” based on the encounter model

The physical integrity of senses, in the above sense, can be a theoretical ground for resistance against the “capital-digital-state”. On the level of sensibility, each person has possibilities and contingencies to make their own sensual orders and express them through their own language, which is enabled by the action of the “common sense”. Put differently, to be a person or an individuality is to recapture the world of sensible experiences as a whole, because individuality cannot be conceivable without encounters with differences. The present “capital-digital-state” cannot provide us with this sensible fulfillment, although the digital devices can give us a means to share our experiences.

In the above sense, Nakamura’s philosophy of the “common sense” is not disjunct with his criticism of capitalism. Here we can understand the importance of Marx’s vision for Nakamura. Admittedly, although Nakamura does not focus on Marx so much, we need to mention the fact that Nishida’s philosophy of “awareness” in history was formed through facing Marx’s materialism, especially in the 1920s to 1930s (Nishida 1929; 1931; 1932), and Nakamura critically brings Nishida’s view back to the issue of historical formations of institutions. This led Nakamura to admit Marx’s following description in *Economic Philosophical Manuscript*: “The formation of the five senses is an elaboration of the whole world history down to the present” (Marx 1975: 140). For my argument, this is resonant with the Kantian axiom. Nonetheless, our desires for things under capitalism are configured, and it renders our “unsatisfied desires” to something identifiable as a value represented by



money (Nakamura 1979=2000: 51-53). From the view of the “common sense”, the “capital-digital-state” divides the “common sense” from each *sense* in the commodity market and gives an ideological scheme to the idea of the *common*. However, the view of the “common sense” regards this distinction between each sense and the *common* as an absurdity, rather it orients us to the way that the *common* works in our sensitive experiences in surrounding ecologies.

To sum up, first, although Nakamura’s philosophy is not Marxist, it should be emphasized that his argument of the “common sense” ushers in critical investigations to and alternative views beyond the “capital-digital-state”, because he tried to provide us with a physical ground for our reasons and ethics. However, these reasons and ethics cannot be possible without encounters with surrounding ecology and others that is externalized by the existing system. This is what Nakamura implied from his argument of the “common sense”, although his position was not clear about the capitalist system, because his entire argument was motivated to show the view of the “common sense” as non-western, post-Descartes, and post-Kantian logic. Second, as this paper discussed him in comparison with Karatani, we can reinterpret Nakamura’s philosophy as a reformulation of the Kantian view of reason and ethics in terms of the “common sense”, especially in our age where the “capital-digital-state” replaces the “common sense” with digital devices. Furthermore, this post-Kantian reformulation *alongside* Kant’s ethical view, can also contribute to overcoming the Japanese imperialistic view. Third and lastly, we can regard the view of the “common sense” as the external logic to the “Borromean knot”, and this external status of it can open human sensibilities to the surrounding ecology and to others.

## Conclusion

In this paper, I try to revise Karatani’s view of the “capital-nation-state” into the alternative one of a “capital-digital-state” and the work of the “imagination” in terms of the “common sense” argued by Nakamura. To conclude, we could find a meaningfully possible dialogue between Karatani and Nakamura in the sense that the “capital-nation-state” has been replaced by the “capital-digital-state”, which means that the sensitive human body comes to the fore for the reconstruction of our imaginations.

Finally, this revision of the “capital-nation-state” can open the question: How can we evaluate the replacement of the “imagination” with digitalization? One answer is negative, because it means the death of the “imagination” through encounters, i.e., the “common sense”. However, can we see a positive side in this crisis? Can we evaluate this situation as a new possibility of our “imagination”? Otherwise put, the replacement of the “imagination” that used to represent the national collectivity in the modern world is relieved from its role to mediate the state and the capital. It remains uncertain how our “imagination” will transform and encompass the “capital-digital-state” after this release of the “imagination”. However, this is the next task. From the development of Nakamura’s philosophy, it suffices to point out here the possibility that our activities of encounters with the surrounding ecology need to be more and more encouraged to the extent that the chain of these encounters forms the encompassing “place” in Nishida’s and Nakamura’s sense for the system of the “capital-digital-state”, which is the new space for the “imagination”.

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