

Beyond Sklavenmoral – Kanamaru Toshiyuki and Harry Graf Kessler

Kanamaru-san (id:kana0355) is a pragmatic linguist based in the languages department of Kyoto University. The same Kanamaru-san is also a deep Nico Chuu, who has not one, but two Nico Nico Douga premium accounts, so that both he and his wife can log in at the same time as premium users. Recently, Kanamaru-san has started to bring his two sides together: He started to look at Nico Nico Douga as a linguist. What will come out of it, is not yet fully clear, but bound to become exciting. When finished, his project will give us a comparative analysis of the forms of speech on Nico Nico Douga on the one hand, and on Japanese Youtube on the other.

Kanamaru-san joined our focus group in Kyoto, and was so kind to meet with us for lunch on the next day. We had planned just a quick follow-up, but our conversation lasted for hours. Kanamura-san speaks fluently English, crafts his words carefully and thinks precisely. His new research project asks how the basic difference of the comments' placement – on Youtube, comments are placed underneath, whereas on Nico Nico Douga they are on the video – creates the specific speech situations of commenting on Nico Nico Douga and Youtube.

For Kanamaru-san, a fundamental difference of Nico Nico Douga is the direction of speech in relation to other speakers. On Youtube most comments are single comments. This might be visualised as "|". As a

¹ In this series of short and preliminary (!!) texts we publish first results of the Metadata Project's ethnographic research on Nico Nico Douga. You can find more under "output" on <http://www.goldsmiths.ac.uk/media-research-centre/project2.php> and on our research blog: <http://d.hatena.ne.jp/metagold/>.

whole, the comments form this structure: "|+|+|". Sometimes they relate to each other as comments about comments, and if they do, they create this: "-|". Nico Nico Douga is different. Its fundamental communication structure can be visualised as "|||". Its comments react to each other, even though they hardly ever comment each other. Instead, they form a joint attitude: The Kuuki. The comments look together in the same way in the same direction, and as such, they melt, and become a collective attitude.

While we talked in Kyoto, I could not really clarify, why this is so fascinating for me. Some weeks later, in Tokyo, it became already a bit clearer: There I talked to Nakano-san, who is one of the inventors of Nico Nico Douga: I learned from him that Nico Nico Douga came out of the idea to create an experience of audience for music videos on mobile phones (more about this here in a week or two). Last week, things began to clarify even further. In the South of France, where I retreated for a week of writing, my friend Graf Tati placed a book on the table in the front of me, while we were sitting in the shade to survive the French heat.



Harry Graf Kessler

The book was a biography of Harry Graf Kessler, a German diplomat, writer, art collector, and traveller. Graf Kessler was born 1868 into an upper class background – "Graf" translates into "Count" –, and epitomises the transformation from Europe's 19th to its 20th century:

A bisexual party king, who assisted to prepare Nietzsche's death mask; a diplomat for the German Kaiserreich (think: Meiji period), who sympathised with the communists; a critic of modernist art, who discussed it with everyone from George Grosz to Bert Brecht; a defender and supporter of the radical avantgarde, who personally preferred classical Greek and Japanese culture. But what has Harry Graf Kessler to do with the work of Kanamaru-san?

We have to go to London for this, and back to the early years of the 20th century. Whenever in London, Graf Kessler visited the boxing matches in Whitechapel, which was then, and too a smaller extend still is, one of London's poorest areas. The beauty of the boxers, the brutality and the blood, but most importantly, the audience, which "shouted, whistled, stormed, as if possessed" fascinated the posh German Count. Harry Graf Kessler saw in this mass an alternative blueprint to what Nietzsche had described some years earlier as the "Sklavenmoral" (slave morality) of the judgement by the masses.

Nietzsche despised the Sklavenmoral. It judges the world on the criteria of good and evil intentions. Therefore it associates 'good' with niceness and usability for the largest possible amount of people. Against this, Nietzsche celebrated the lonely judgement of the single few. Only they have the strength to develop a Herrenmoral (= master morality), which divides the world into good and bad. The resulting idea of 'good' is freed of any niceness. But it is neither critical. Indeed, Sklavenmoral is at its basis critical (because the weak despise the masters). Herrenmoral is at its basis affirmative. This is, according to Nietzsche, the starting point to create anything of significance.

Back to Kessler. Even though Kessler was deeply influenced by Nietzsche, he was not so convinced by what he called Nietzsche's "culte de moi". For Kessler, the collective judgement of "greater individualities" – that is groups of people, who judge as one – had a

higher value than the judgement of the singular individual. And here, in these boxing fights in Whitechapel, he saw it realised.



A boxing match in Whitechapel – one of Harry Graf Kessler's favorite hang outs

So now you might already get, what I am hinting at. Nico Nico Douga is another form of what Harry Graf Kessler had observed in Whitechapel more than one hundred years ago. In this context it is interesting that 11 years before Graf Kessler attended the boxing matches in Whitechapel, he had travelled to Japan as part of his world trip in 1892. There he lived for a significant time in Kamakura, which is, as Kyoto, one of the former capitals of Japan.



Kamakura, another one of Harry Graf Kessler's favorite places

I am not sure whether Kessler's Nietzsche critique was inspired by his Japanese experience. In any case, I think Graf Kessler's remarks catch something essential about Nico Nico Douga. Both the boxing match and Nico Nico Douga form a communication structure of collective attitude (|||), which provides an alternative to single judgements (|), comments about comments (-|), or, indeed, the accumulation of single judgements (|+|+|).

Nietzsche's mistake was to identify a common attitude (|||) with the accumulation of single judgements (|+|+|). Nietzsche is only right, if you identify collective judgement with the latter, and indeed, Nietzsche's furore against the Sklavenmoral can still be translated into a damning critique of mainstream consumerism: Its judgements are nothing else than the accumulation of many mediocre singular judgements (|+|+|). So: Yes, as "|+|+|", you remain a slave. But as "|||", you have the ability to develop a Herrenmoral – and even more so than when you are only "|".

If we follow Graf Kessler, we can expect that this new form of "|||"–speech might be more intelligent, more valid, and might indeed lead us to new forms of art. The plurality of comments ceases to be an accumulation of different opinions. Nor is it a negotiation of opinions. It resembles the audience in a concert. Fans in a concert do not look at each other as well, but at the same time applause is more than an accumulation of many pairs of clapping hands. Applause is a collective that speaks.

So far, so good. And indeed, one could say, a bit over the top. Why should a clapping and shouting audience in a boxing fight enable us to move beyond Sklavenmoral? Isn't Kessler taking his enthusiasm for boxing crowds a bit too far? To address this, we obviously have push to the analysis further. Let's try. In a diary entry of October 22nd

1903, Kessler elaborates on his ideas and applies them to art (sorry, but I have to give this quote in German):

"Jeder Mensch ist schoen, wenn man ihn einzeln und fuer sich betrachtet: Aber die Menge ergibt die Haesslichkeit. Um eine `schoene´ Kultur zu schaffen, kommt es nicht darauf an, den Einzelnen zu kultivieren, sondern die Beziehungen der Einzelnen untereinander harmonisch zu machen, wie man ein Klavier stimmt auf ein Verhaeltnis der Seiten untereinander, nicht auf einen schoenen Klang der einzelnen Seite; denn von den Beziehungen kommt die Haesslichkeit. (...) Der Deutsche operiert bei der Kultur immer mit der falschen Abstraktion: Persoenlichkeit. Er schafft sich eine Sammetjacke oder gruene Weste an. Die Beziehung zu den anderen uebersieht er ganz. Aber fuer die Kultur kommt es viel weniger darauf an, wie die Einzelnen sind, als wie sie sich zueinander verhalten. Die Beziehung ist hier Alles, wie bei den Farben in einem Bilde."

It is beyond my capabilities to give you an exact translation of this quote, but here is a quick summary: Kessler first argues that while humans are beautiful as singulars, the mass is ugly. However, and in a way contradicting this starting point, he then says that if you want to create a 'beautiful' culture, you should not cultivate the singular. In opposite, you have to change the relationships between the singulars. He compares this to tuning a piano: Here you don't tune a single string, but harmonise their relationships. Wrong and typical German is, according to the German Kessler, if you aim for 'personality', which he calls a wrong abstraction. Decisive is how the singulars relate to each other, just like colors relate to each other in a painting.

It is quite interesting, how he uses his two metaphors: piano and painting. When he talks about the piano, it is about tuning, which he sees as forming relationships of strings. This might be the equivalent of setting up the basic communication structure of Nico Nico Douga: The "|||" – a largely affirmative kuuki. In his second metaphor, paintings, it is the relationships between colours that create meaning. And this is what Nico Nico Douga does as well. The kuuki of the comment is not only applause. It is like applause, but more. It is

applause that speaks. It is the collective speaking, and speaking not only with the limited vocabulary of clapping, whistling, booing, silence, or leaving the event. What we can here observe are collective sentences, attitudes, complex commentary.

It is this, which is new about Nico Nico Douga, and which goes beyond the boxing match in Whitechapel 100 years ago. Nico Nico Douga elaborates collective speaking, and while it does so, it enters new territory. I would go so far as to say: It has created a speech situation that humanity experiences for the first time. And you can go even one step further: It is a speech situation that indeed might enable humanity to move beyond the alternative between what Nietzsche has described as Sklavenmoral of the masses and the judgement of the single chosen few. Kessler saw only the first glimpse of that. What we might now see, is Harry Graf Kessler's enthusiastic vision becoming reality.

So if you are willing to follow the argument to this point, the next question is: Are we seeing a Herrenmoral of the collective, or is this something beyond the alternative of Sklavenmoral and Herrenmoral altogether. Of course, it is too early to give a final answer for that. However, one trait of Nico Nico Douga would support the former (a new Herrenmoral of the collective): Its largely affirmative nature. In this view, the affirmative nature of Nico Nico Douga is not so much a return to Japanese politeness after the rough wild west days of 2channel, but the second step of a development of a collective voice. The first step was the largely critical 2channel: The collective united, but knew no better than to criticize. Nico Nico Douga is the second step, where the new collective starts to realise its true potential.

Now I really have entered highly speculative territory. To finish this post, I want to make one step back and return to safer grounds. What we can see there is already spectacular enough. I think we can already

say for sure that we see a new speech situation. In this, Nico Nico Douga is maybe only comparable to Wikis in general and Wikipedia in particular. Just like Nico Nico Douga, Wikis and Wikipedia provided us with a new form of collective speech: In the case of Wikis, it is a non-confrontative form of accumulative negotiation, in the case of Nico Nico Douga it is a non-confrontative form of collective speech. Indeed, the newness of Nico Nico Douga is even more basic: Whereas Wikipedia has a direct trajectory in the negotiation of documents, Nico Nico Douga has created something that humanity did not know before: A collective form of speech that has the ability to express more than the alternative like it/like it not.

It is this new form of collective, affirmative and complex feedback that excited me so much, when Kanamaru-san told me about his research project, five weeks ago in his office in Kyoto university. I have described here only the start of Kanamaru-san's analysis. After all, he is a linguist. He will dive into computer-aided empirical analysis of the forms of speech in Nico Nico Douga. His research will look into how individual speech acts are formed so that they can enter this process of melting into a collective sentence. And that is, of course, an absolutely crucial point for analysis. Bringing his two sides - linguist and Nico Chuu - together, Kanamura-san has boarded on a truly thrilling intellectual adventure.