



# DIJ Forum

Thursday, 9 October 2024, 18.00 – 19.30 (JST)

## Why Futuristic Imaginations Matter

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Despite how far human civilization and technology have come, we cannot reliably predict the future. Proponents of the technological singularity – a forthcoming big bang-like point of no return where humanity becomes irrevocably altered by technology – try to pinpoint the next steps in our evolution based on natural laws, but their controversial hypotheses are more storytelling than anything else. Yet, such narratives and imaginations, however hyperbolic they may be, are essential to human cognition. They help us make sense of the past, present, and future, be it individual or collective. In this event, we will therefore make no attempts at predicting the future. Instead, we will examine how future-related storytelling (like the tale of the singularity) captivates, inspires, and even becomes a driving force of technological innovation. To that end, we will explore the narrative-based cognitive underwiring of our consciousness and how those narratives help us conceptualize the future and time itself, and from there we will then venture into the world of current Japanese Science Fiction Prototyping initiatives, where fiction narrates technological futures into being.

**Fritz Breithaupt** is Provost Professor at Indiana University Bloomington in Cognitive Science and Germanic Studies. His research focuses on narrative thinking, empathy, and intellectual history. He is the author of 6 widely read and translated books. His research has been published in journals in both the humanities and sciences, including *Nature: Scientific Reports* and *Critical Inquiry*. He is the director and founder of the Experimental Humanities Lab that creates an innovative space by bridging empirical research, philosophy and humanities. He received Fulbright, Humboldt, and The New Institute fellowships.

**Hiroataka Osawa** is an associate professor at Keio University, where he is also director of the Keio Science Fiction Research Development Center, and a visiting associate professor at the University of Tsukuba. His research field includes human-agent interaction, the development of anthropomorphic devices, simulation using social games for social agents, and exploring humanity studies through science fiction literature. He focuses on how human-like appearance and attitude enhance the interaction between users and machines, as well as the role of social intelligence in improving our society. He holds a PhD in Engineering as well a Master's degree and a Bachelor's degree in Computer Science from Keio University.

The event will be held in English online and onsite at the DIJ Tokyo ([access](#)). Admission is free. The presentations by Professor Breithaupt and Professor Osawa will be followed by a Q&A session and a small reception. To participate in this DIJ Forum online or onsite, please register via our event website <https://dij.tokyo/futures>. This event is part of the Workshop, 'Imagined Futures in Japan and Beyond'.

**Deutsches Institut für Japanstudien – German Institute for Japanese Studies**

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