

昨日の空のありどころ —与謝蕪村「いかのぼり」の新解釈

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与謝蕪村の俳句「いかのぼりきのふの空のありどころ」に関する新たな解釈を提唱する。蕪村の専門家の多くが、昨日も同じ場所に凧が浮かんでいた、との解釈を取るが、松岡正剛、橋本治らは、昨日みえていた凧が今日は見えない、との解釈をとる。本ノートでは、この俳句作品のフランス語訳を試みるとともに、既存の英訳も点検し、両者の解釈を止揚する観点を提起する。その哲学的な裏づけとしては、マルセル・プルーストの『失われた時を求めて』の時間意識、ジル・ドゥルーズの『反復と差異』が動員され、蕪村の俳諧世界が世界的な視野で検討するに値する次元を帯びていたことを立証する。また江戸俳諧から近代俳句に至る「凧」を話題とした作品とも比較することで、空中を浮遊する物体を地上からコマンドすることの意味を問い直す。この観点はさらに、中空の凧をひく糸と、海中の魚への釣り糸との対比へと発展し、不可視な世界あるいは制御困難な事態と距離を置いて接触する体験が含む、能動でも受動でもない、中動的な態度に秘められた意味に及ぶ。ここから本ノートは結論として、マルセル・デュシャンに対抗しつつ津軽凧に着想を得た工藤哲巳の人魂としての凧を取り上げ、時空を横断する魂の遍歴の提喩としての凧あげ、という仮説を展開する。

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Kites Floating in Yesterday's Sky;

An Interpretation of Yosa Buson's Haikai Poetry

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For about a week I remained in a state of daze. Just outside the apartment window was a kite caught in the telegraph wires; blown about and ripped by the dusty spring wind, it nevertheless clung tenaciously to the wires, as if in affirmation of something. Every time I looked at the kite I had to smile with embarrassment and blush. It haunted me even in my dreams.

Dazai Osamu, *No Longer Human*²

Introduction¹ (fig. 1)

How did haikai poets interpret kites floating in the air? The paper tries to give a comprehensive overview while putting emphasis on one poem, a masterpiece by Yosa Buson (1716-1784), the famous poet and painter in the style of Southern School: "A kite floats. At the place in the sky. Where it floated yesterday." This paper proposes an alternative interpretation to this conventional translation and

offers philosophical insights with a view to highlighting a frame of mind distinctive to Tokugawa Japan. As a probe in the air, the kite navigates its way in accordance with weather conditions and does not always follow human command. It is in this unstable condition that the Tokugawa poets detect a subtle feeling of life. Yosa Buson, in particular, imposes the uncertain consciousness of time and memory of the past on this ephemeral precarity. The gliding kite thus transforms into a vehicle crossing between the past and present while forecasting the uncertain future.

1

Let us begin with a popular song for children, composed by Taki Rentarô (1879-1903) for lyrics by Azuma Kume (1877-1969) in 1901. "How many nights have we to count before the coming of the New Year? When the New Year comes, why not play with spinning tops and fly kites..." The song echoes the yearning for the approaching New Year (o-shôgatsu). Before treating the subject matter, a brief etymological examination is necessary. The kite used to be called "ika-nobori" in Japanese, "ika" being a squid while "nobori" means banner. The inhabitants of the archipelago have the habit of drying captured squids on a stretched string-similar to kites floating in the air.

Why, then, is the current Japanese word for kite "tako," which is a homonym for "octopus" not squid? In 1646 (Shôhō 3), the Tokugawa Shogunate forbade flying kites in the city of Edo, in the



fig. 1 Poster for a Conférence à l'Institut français du Japon - Tokyo Dimanche 3 juillet 2022.

aftermath of an incident where a burning kite accidentally (or intentionally) lost control and fell, shamelessly crashing in the precinct of the Edo castle. A similar incident occurred just a couple of years ago, on 22 April, 2015, when a drone (with some radioactive emission detected) fell on the roof of the Prime Minister's office, revealing a gap in the security level of the government office³. The incident resulted in tightening the law for permission for operating drones in urban areas. To return to the Tokugawa Period and the seventeenth century, the Edo citizen astutely shirked the interdiction: instead of calling the flying object "ika-squid" they renamed it "octopus" so as to avoid legal penalty. Yet the term "Ika-nobori" survived outside the capital city, continued to be used especially in the composition of haikai poetry in seventeen syllables. In fact "ika-nobori" was registered as a "kigo" or a season word indicating the coming of the spring.

Let us now quote one of the most famous poems by Yosa Buson 与謝蕪村 (1716-1784):

"Ikanobori Kinofu no Sora no Aridokoro"
 いかのぼり きのふの空のありどころ

The prose has been traditionally translated as follows:

"A kite floats. At the place in the sky. Where it floated yesterday." This interpretation, which is still favored, presupposes that the same kite remains in the air in the precise place where it was yesterday. And yet, some of the leading critics, like Hashimoto Osamu (1948-2019) and Matsuoka Seigô (1946-) diverge from the conventional path; they claim that the kite is no longer in sight although it was clearly visible yesterday⁴. "The kite, where is it? At the place in the sky where it floated yesterday. It is no longer there."

The first interpretation, which still prevails, insists on the repetition which reinforces the reminiscence. The second one, which is a minority view, prefers to point out the subtle surprise of the loss—the poet recognizes all of a sudden that he is

no longer able to recognize what has been there up until yesterday.

The original Japanese allows both of these divergent interpretations, as it simply states: "A kite, The place, Where it was Yesterday." Generally speaking, repetition generates a habitude, but as it becomes convention can fall into desuetude. Regular routine is no longer recognized as worth mention and cast out of conscious attention. It is only the accidental happening which evokes the sense of irregularity and awakes our consciousness. The sudden absence of what had been habitually observed becomes a trigger; we notice only then the irremediable loss. The nostalgia or yearning for the lost home and childhood is a typical case. The irrevocable suddenly becomes invaluable in its fatal loss.

Transcription (*utsushi*) implies transition (*utsuroi*) which marks a gap; so long as the gap is not perceived, we remain unaware of the passage of time. This is the reason why difference and repetition, to borrow the famous book title from Gilles Deleuze (1925-1995), does not constitute an opposition but they are mutually dependent, and reinforced with each other in their unstable dynamism⁵. The short poem by Buson we are examining, reveals such an instability by the very indeterminacy of its message: in fact we are not quite sure if the poet is actually looking at the kite, or has just noted its absence from sight. Whatever the case, the truth manifests itself in the dissociated fragments of reality torn apart between the present and the past. The truth is revealed only later, after a certain lapse of time to the spectator's eye as a fatally delayed retrospection.

In this way, the readers of this haiku by Buson are invited to contemplate his or her own experience of the past, in search of his "Temps perdu" or Time lost. The visual reminiscence that Buson evokes here is itself reminiscent of "la petite madeleine" in Marcel Proust's (1871-1922) *A la recherche du temps perdu*, which would also account for the popularity of this novel among Japanese readers⁶. "Yesterday's lost sky" inevitably reminds us of the skies we saw in our own adolescence and childhood. Further this retrospection touches

upon a collective imagination, that lies beyond the personal recollection and fuses with the impersonal domain of the unconscious preceding our individual birth, and brings us back to time immemorial. We thus come close to the mindscape that was made familiar by Lafcadio Hearn, the American writer of Irish and Greek blood, naturalized in Japan as Koizumi Yakumo 小泉八雲 (1850-1904)⁷.

2

If Buson's haikai supports the analysis so far, another question comes to mind: what are we searching for then? The kite or yesterday's sky? A literal transcription remains ambiguous, as we are not quite sure which is visible, and which is lost. "Yesterday's sky" is by definition no longer present, and if the poet simply states that a kite floats at the place in the sky where it floated yesterday, the statement is nothing but a simple platitude. It is rather the ambiguous instability of the kite –we are not sure if it is still visible in the sky or no longer there—which "reactualizes," so to speak, "yesterday's sky" as a negative prescription. Because "yesterday's sky" is necessarily absent, it lingers on as nothing but the sign of expired validity.

The alternation between the visible and invisible is here rearticulated by the interplay between the actual perception of the scene and the ghost image on the retina remaining in the eye like a memory. The back and forth between the visual and mental fields and the gap between the two turns out to be the origin nourishing the sentiment of nostalgia, or Heimweh, literally the pain caused by the irremediable loss of the homeland.

Why then, is the kite capable of evoking so strongly the lost past –"temps perdu" in French and "Vergangenheit" in German? Why can the kite so easily superimpose different layers of time and memory? The answer may be that the kite in Buson's haiku appears not only as a point of reference that evokes the past in retrospection, but also because the fragile apparatus remains floating in an unstable state in the air, constantly or temporally suspended between the sky and the land.

Yokoi Yayû 横井也有 (1702-1783), another eighteenth-century poet composed the following haiku:

Miokuru mo Ito ha Teniari Ikanobori
見送るも 糸は手にあり いかのぼり
Good-by, the kite leaves me, And the line
alone, cut off, remains in my hand

The irremediable distance is perceived by the poet between the far-off image of the kite and the lost tactile sensation in proximity which still remains in the hand of the operator. Ôshima Tadeta 大嶋蓼太 (1718-1787), also of the eighteenth century, observes a kite straying away and disappearing beyond a hill.

Kire-dako no Yûgoe yukuya Matsuchi-yama
切れ凧の夕越えゆくや待乳山
A kite without the string is flying away
beyond the hill of Matsuchi-yama

Matsuchi-yama is a small hill not far away from Asakusa and located in the North East of Edo (now Tokyo). "Matsuchi-yama" literally means "the mountain waiting for some milk," evoking maternal nourishment. Young ravens are popularly known in Japan to return home at dusk. They could safely reach their mother's nest, but the lone erring kite has lost its master and all hope of being rescued.

Masaoka Shiki 正岡子規 (1867-1902), a modernist renovator of the Haikai tradition at the end of the nineteenth century appears more drastic and hard-boiled than his predecessors. He observed reality with a dry objective eye without betraying any sense of melancholy.

Kiredako no Hirono no nakani ochini keru
切れ凧の広野のなかに落ちにけり
Its string cut, the kite has fallen into a field,
vast and empty

The poet narrates the incident of the crash in an intentionally laconic tone; the kite is simply helpless. The vast and empty field accentuates all the more cruelly the irremediable destiny of the delinquent apparatus. The forced touch-down and

its inevitable loss in the midst of a savage field certainly reflects the state of mind of an individual observer, no less isolated and surprised by this unexpected incident; a clear sign of modernity in haikai poetry. The following example may support this hypothesis:

Hitonoko no Tako ageteiru Ware ha tabi
 人の子の凧あげて居る 我は旅
 A boy I don't know whose is playing with a
 kite, and I am on my travel

Someone's child flies a kite, I am traveling

Obviously, the solitude of the traveler is projected on the precarious destiny of a kite. The unknown child manipulating the kite at a distance may also be an alter-ego of the poet himself.

Though a solitary action, a kite cannot be flown without the collaboration of an element of nature, the wind. One of Masaoka Shiki's disciples, Kawahigashi Hekigotô 河東碧梧桐 (1873-1937), famous for his eccentric calligraphy, describes the take-off of a kite:

Chisaki ko no Hashirite agaru Ika nobori
 小さき子の走りてあがるいかのぼり
 A small boy runs, and we see the kite taking
 off

The flyer of a kite cannot always control the flying object. The kite changes its course according to the winds and often takes its direction without following human command. While obedient for a



fig.2 Kite Flying. Harunobu Suzuki 1766/
 凧揚げ 鈴木 春信

while to the manipulator, the kite may be overwhelmed by a sudden strong wind, and the fragile apparatus may be thrust into danger, defying the kite flyer to pilot it safely. Two modern haiku poems refer to such moments. Nagakura Gogetsu 長倉梧月 (1875-1951) relates the happy moment of controlling a kite with ease, while Watanabe Suiha 渡辺水巴 (1882-1946) describes a bad experience of being injured while letting out the kite with the wind.

Teni hikibu Unari ureshiya Ikanobori
 手にひびく唸りうれしや いかのぼり
 The beat coming to my hand, what a joy to
 feel it! The kite is in the sky

Tako agetshi Te no kizutsukite Boten kana
 凧揚げし 手の傷つきて 暮天かな
 Flying a kite, My hand was hurt, alas the
 evening sky

3.

The kite is a *sonde* sent up in the air. It is not a mechanical engine but a passive observer sensitive to constantly changing meteorological conditions. Metaphorically one may call it an apparatus functioning in the middle voice (to borrow a grammatical term); neither passive nor active, the kite constantly searches for an equilibrium in its aleatory itinerary in the air, in confrontation with contradictory conditions⁸. The force to elevate it



fig.3 From Katsushika Hokusai,
 Chie no Umi 葛飾北斎 千絵の海 (detail)

蚊針流 かばりながし
 "Kabari Nagashi" mosquito like hook
 Dropping in the river current

to the sky by making good use of a favorable wind must be counterbalanced by the traction toward the earth through the string connected with the manipulator.

While the kite aspires to go higher and higher in the sky (fig.2), pole fishing descends deep into the sea (fig.3). Though the directions are opposite, they share something in common. While the sondage/sounding in the air detects the aerodynamic conditions of the atmosphere not easily visualized, sounding in the sea is a tentative search for the behavior of fishes by way of tactile sensation. In both cases visual perception is no longer useful and the tactile sensation that one can receive at the extreme limit of the string connected to the kite or fishing hook, is the only indicator to guide handling. While the kite searches for harmony with the nature of the wind in the high sky beyond human reach, angling detects the fish's appetite in the deep invisible sea.

In both cases, tactile sensation is dependent on the unpredictable caprices of the agents (be it wind or fish) located at the opposite end of the line. What is essential in this operation is a dynamic equilibrium that establishes itself in the constant back and forth between human and natural agencies; the latter being constantly changing like the wind, or living like a fish, and therefore unpredictable. What is indispensable is to seize the right moment in a spontaneous and intuitive way, otherwise the operation is doomed to failure.

This recalls the experiment that Benjamin Franklin (1706-1790) conducted in Philadelphia in 1752. To prove that the thunderbolt is an electric discharge, Franklin sent a kite up in the air during a storm. He surmised that when the lightning hits the kite, the metallic key at the other end of the string should liberate the electricity and emit a spark. In honor of this experience, the Japanese American artist, Isamu Noguchi (1904-1988) created the commemorative monument *Bolt of Lightning* (fig.4). Initially conceived in 1933, it was not until late in life in 1985 that it was finally installed at Monument Plaza in Philadelphia. This sculpture in a form of a huge key, is conceived as a lightning rod. Between the sky and the earth the link is made by the kite conducting the electric discharge⁹.

4.

Floating in the air, located in between the earth and sky, the kite serves as a gateway between the past and the present. Further, the kite is also conceived as a ferry crossing the river of life and death. Like a kite the soul can also navigate between this world and the other world of the dead.

The Japanese artist, Kudô Tetsumi (1935-1990) was mainly active in France, but returned home in his final years. Inspired by the kites of Tsugaru peninsula, at the northern tip of Honshû, the main island of Japan, where he grew up, Kudô invents the *Surviving Sperm from the Jômon prehistoric age* (1986) (fig.5). With this work, Kudô speculated on life and death as chromosomes, the transmitters



fig.4 Artist Isamu Noguchi stands in front of his "Bolt of Lightning" sculpture



fig.5 Kudô Tetsumi, *Survivant spermatozoïdes De l'ère préhistorique du Jômon*, 1986
Aomori Museum of Art
工藤哲巳
<縄文の精子の生き残り>
1986年、51.0×40.0cm
青森県立美術館蔵
© ADAGP, Paris & JASPAR, Tokyo, 2013



fig.6 Cf. Kudô Tetsumi, *Marcel Duchamp dans le fil infini, Méditation entre future programmé et mémoire Enregistrée*, 1977, Aichi Prefectural Museum, Kudô Retrospective, *Your Portrait*, 2014-5, Cat.127 (pé298)

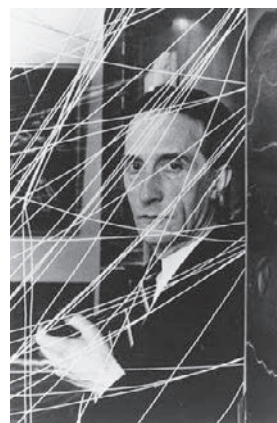


fig.7 Marcel Duchamp behind his installation of "His Twine" NYC c.1942 by Arnold Newman

of genetic information from one generation to the other. Previously, Kudô made works by entangling chromosome-like threads in the guise of a cat's cradle in which Marcel Duchamp (1887-1968) (fig.6) is imprisoned by his own will (the cat's cradle was a favorite amusement for Duchamp in his final years) (fig.7). Then Kudô juxtaposes two bobbins of thread; a centripetal bobbin denoting the past and a centrifugal one representing the future, while the present is located in between the two spindles¹⁰.

The entanglement of the generic threads of DNA finally takes off like a kite which Kudô designs in the form of a collective spermatozoa. The kite here represents the collective soul of ancestors in a state of indissoluble fusion, floating in the air, it looks like an ectoplasmic emanation in Esoteric thought. The present time that the kite stands for is a particular point, in a dialectical relation between Being and Nothingness, to borrow the terminology of Jean-Paul Sartres (1905-1980)¹¹. The cat's cradle in Kudô's conception is a place of phantasmagoria where the dead can be converted into living souls. Kudô asks why we exist, and replies: We are living precisely to think about the reason why we are living. The kite as the recipient of ancestral souls remains suspended between Being and Nothingness, between the void and the plenitude for eternity.

Conclusion

In concluding this reflection, let us return to the Haikai on the kite by Yosa Buson.

"Ikanobori Kinofu no Sora no Aridokoro"
 いかのぼり きのふの空のありどころ

"A kite floats. At the place in the sky. Where it floated yesterday." Or "A kite is no longer there, where it floated yesterday." In final analysis, yesterday's sky is omnipresent, everywhere, as a void and nothingness, and in contingency we can touch it easily like a phantom. In the reminiscence of a kite we notice the resurrection of the dead. Let us also think of an hourglass. At the narrowest part of the tube the passing of sands, or souls, becomes most intense. And this is where the kite appears and disappears, like a ghost, defying us to discern whether it is present or absent. To say that the kite is present in yesterday's sky is of course nonsensical, simply because yesterday's sky no longer exists. And yet it is no more logical to maintain that yesterday's sky is legitimized so long as the kite is absent in front of us. It was in between these two absurdities that Buson sought a secret margin, even while contradicting himself. Here is a virtual threshold which allows the imagination to wake up the reminiscence of the past, which accordingly becomes intimate and irreplaceable.

¹ The paper was originally read at the ICAS held at Kyoto Seika University, under the title: "Kites in the Haikai Poetic Tradition" in a round table "Japanese Kit: At the Crossroads of Arts," organized by Cécile Laly, on Sat. 28, Aug. 2021 at 13:00-14:00 JST. A French version is published as *Cerfs-volants du Japon, À la croisée des arts*, ed. by Cécile Laly (Paris: Nouvelles Éditions Scala, 2021), pp. 39-45.

² Dazai Osamu, *No Longer Human/人間失格* (1948) trans. Donald Keene (London: Peter Owen, 1959), p. 100. The author thanks Bert Winther-Tamaki for reminding this passage while native-checking and brushing-up the manuscript.

³ *Nippon Keizai Shinbun Newspaper*, April 22, 2015.

⁴ Matsuoka Seigō, *Modoki, « Yo » aruiha betsuyou no kanousei (Modoki-Mimicry- A 'World-loka or Another Possibility of Being in a different way)*, Tokyo : Shunjūsha, pp. 13-16.

⁵ Gilles Deleuze, *Différence et répétition*, Paris, Presses universitaires de France, 1968.

⁶ Since the pioneering work by Inoue Kyūichirō (1973-1988), 3 complete individual translations have been published in Japan so far, Suzuki Michihiko (1996-2002), and Yoshikawa Kazuyoshi (2010-2019) with another new one by Takatō Hiromi in course (2010-).

⁷ See among others, Lafcadio Hearn, *Kottō: Being Japanese Curios, with Sundry Cobwebs* (1902).

⁸ Cf. Kokubun Kōichirō, *Chūdoutai no Sekai, Ishi to sekinin no Koukogaku (The World of Middle Voice; an Archaeology of the will and the responsibility)*, Tokyo: Igaku Shoin, 2020.

⁹ <https://www.associationforpublicart.org/artwork/bolt-of-lightning-a-memorial-to-benjamin-franklin/>

¹⁰ On Kudō, see the exhibition catalogue and catalogue raisonné: *Your Portrait, Kudō Tetsumi Retrospective*, National Museum of Art, Osaka (NMAO), 2013-14.

¹¹ Jean-Paul Sartre, *L'Être et le Néant, essai d'ontologie phénoménologique*, Paris, Éditions Gallimard, 1943.